

BRAVE SPIRITS

by
GEORGINA SIME
and
FRANK NICHOLSON

These be brave spirits indeed!

THE TEMPEST

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GEORGINA SIME

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A Whiff of William Morris
as a Socialist



1. *A Whiff of William Morris
as a Socialist*

I

When I was about eleven years old we—my father, my mother and I—moved from the part of London where we had been living to Chiswick, a suburb at that time about forty minutes distant from the centre of the city. My nurse, who had been with us from my birth, married just as we took our leave from London and I missed her very much, the more so because I had no brothers or sisters. So when we got to Chiswick my mother, wisely suggesting to me the possibility that I might be alone, quite alone, later in life and that I had better get accustomed to going about independently and becoming used to my own company, encouraged me to make little expeditions from home, see people and things and tell her all about my adventures on my return. Accordingly I roamed round about Chiswick, then the quietest of old suburbs, sometimes seating myself on one of the wooden seats at Turnham Green, where Dick Turpin used to ride up to the London coach with a cocked pistol in his hand and demand “Your money or your life” of the passengers, and sometimes wandering down the long, dignified avenue of ancient trees that led to the entrance of one of the Duke of

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Devonshire's "country houses". I would stand at the beautiful cast-iron gates where the avenue ended and look through them at the gardens, so spacious and shady and in summer so rich in flowers. England still had much of Old England to show one in those days.

One of my favourite walks was by a series of short-cuts across fields as yet unbuilt upon to the house of a "great friend", as we used to say, who was always ready to regale me with a cup of tea and a piece of home-made cake. What long visits we used to pay then and how good those cakes, redolent of the fresh butter and eggs that had gone to their making, used to taste! Not far from where this friend lived, at Shaftesbury Road, was William Morris's house at Hammersmith. It looked on the river, with shady trees between the water and the house-windows. There was a pleasant feeling of roominess in the enclosure with its buildings, and later in life, whenever I read how the visitor to Nowhere stepped out of Nowhere again, so reluctantly, into the "Somewhere" he had come from, it was always this little bit of land that presented itself to my mind's eye. The interior of the Morris house must have been very beautiful. I was never actually in the house, though I became well acquainted with its adjoining stable a few years after the time I am speaking of now. To my young eyes Kelmscott town-house, as some people used to call it, looked from the outside—"mournful" is too positive a word, but at least lacking in gaiety of any kind. Still, I looked at it with interest, for my father always spoke with admiration of what was inside it. I wonder now why I did not talk with him about William Morris; I cannot understand why I did not ask him the many questions to which I should now like to have the answers at hand,

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but I do not remember having ever spoken to him on this subject. I suppose we all of us have some such bare places in the tapestries of our past lives; we didn't do something that we should now like to have done. Anyhow I doubt if I should have got much nearer to Morris's personality even if I had questioned my father about him. That personality is, to my mind, the most difficult and evasive imaginable. He *seemed* open and straightforward, but did he in reality ever confide anything very intimate to anyone? I doubt it. At any rate, all that I can attempt to do in setting down my recollections of him here is to record the impressions that my own personality received from his on the few occasions when I found myself in his company.

The first of these impressions was made on the mind of an ignorant and innocent child, but I give it for what it is worth, for the stamp of it has remained with me to this day as fresh and clear-cut as it was when I received it. The incident in question took place on a wintry day when snow—something of a rarity in London—had been falling steadily for some time and the ground was thick with it. I was on my way to take tea with the friend of whom I have spoken, and on passing through an old-fashioned square, or rather a three-sided group of houses with a railed-in plantation in their midst, I came across a group of men, one of whom was talking while the others, who had evidently been engaged in shovelling away the snow, stood leaning on their spades and listened attentively to what he was saying to them. He too was leaning on his spade but both in dress and appearance he was different from the rest of the group, men of the unskilled labouring class who were in those days always thankful to earn a shilling or two by clearing away snow

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or doing odd jobs. They were all shabby but their shabbiness ranged from that of decent indigence to that of absolute poverty. The man who was talking, not with but to them, was William Morris, and he was dressed, as I remember him, in dark trousers, with a moujik blouse of his own famous blue linen, buttoned at the neck and belted at the waist, with loose sleeves down to the wrists. From the bloused body rose the dark head with its thick, strong, black hair. His hands, as he leant on the handle of his spade, were those of an artist, speaking hands; even then, child as I was, I noticed them. And from his strong throat a round, rough, sonorous voice was borne to my ears.

The little group of houses I have spoken of were of red brick, built in the late eighteenth or possibly the early nineteenth century, and attractive in their compactness; they had been "good" dwelling-places at their start but had drifted down the stream of time and become faded and somewhat shabby relics of the past. Round about them were trees, aged too, with sturdy trunks and spreading branches thickly covered on that day with snow, patches of which occasionally fell on to the ground with a little splash and dump, making the only sound that broke the speaker's fervent words. Sometimes the snow would fall on him or on one or another of his audience, but he continued speaking as if no interruption had occurred or possibly could occur, and the men round about him, leaning motionlessly on their spades, listened with an absorbed interest, as if the sound of that voice were the one thing in the world worth listening to. No one paid the least attention to me as I stopped short at the edge of the "square" and looked in, and the scene, without any kind of persuasion on my part, engraved itself

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upon something inside me for life. I can see it now—the dark sky above, flecked with murky clouds, the tall trees, the snowy ground, the silent houses from which no face was visible at any window, the speaker immersed in what he was saying and the little group round him immersed in what they were listening to, drinking it in and making it their own.

I too listened but I really understood nothing of what my ears received. I had, I suppose, heard of ‘socialism’ but at this time of my life my mind was more deeply engaged in love-stories of any kind than in considering the conditions in which I and the people all round about me had to live. Well, Morris *was* no doubt speaking of “love” on that day so long ago, but he was dealing with it from a side that the love-stories rarely presented. He was speaking of the way of life that our human race has contrived for itself and pointing out how we might all, if we only would, share with each of our fellow creatures the comforts and conveniences that were within our reach. And I didn’t understand; I couldn’t recognize the kinship between that love and the love with which my novels had made me familiar. I take it that every young thing is something of a prig; it is impossible to be broad-minded when one has seen nothing of life. At any rate, though I should probably agree wholeheartedly with Morris if I were to hear him now as he spoke that day, the prig that was to the fore in the girl I was then was horrified, was shocked by the crude unvarnished language in which he expressed his views so that he might make them comprehensible to his listeners. I was, as I have said, a little donkey; I was shocked to the marrow by his workman’s speech and I simply took to my heels and ran out of hearing. I tried to forget the phrasing of

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what I had heard, but there it was, in all its starkness. If a lecturer is to be successful he must of course adapt himself to whatever audience he may be addressing. I often heard Morris speak in later years and nothing, I think, so befited what he had to say as his intensely but not at all affectedly simple diction; it was beautiful, and anyone, "educated" or not, could understand it. But the language he made use of on that dark and snowy winter's day was pungent, smelling of the earth (the word I chiefly objected to was "bloody", a frequently recurring adjective and one not infrequently applied to certain things that I was not accustomed to hear mentioned out loud) and his listeners received it readily, took it home with them and, I do not doubt, slept on the counsel it gave them, while I ran away that I might hear no more of it! Well, this is a queer world and it takes time for anyone born into it to acquire even a little sense.

I have described this little incident at some length because I think it may give some sort of an impression of Morris as he was in the 'eighties of last century or at least as he appeared to a very unsophisticated young girl of that period who was quite unaware of his having already made a place for himself among the "eminent Victorians".

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For years after this little incident I didn't think of Morris at all. I occasionally saw him in passing, sometimes in his moujik blouse, sometimes in more ordinary attire. But, however clad, he always looked *himself*. It may be said that everybody looks himself or herself, but is that true? Most people, it seems to me, even at the time I am speaking of, looked just like everyone else,

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and nowadays they do so in a still greater degree. This was what Morris never did; you couldn't possibly have taken him for anyone but "himself". I had never seen anyone like him when I first set eyes on him, and I have never seen anyone like him since. Except perhaps a little in the way he dressed, there seemed nothing peculiar about him to explain why he looked so different from the rest of us. Possibly it was because his mind was different and set its mark on his outward aspect in a way that we were conscious of, though we couldn't analyse it.

My own chances of meeting with him became rarer soon after my encounter with him on that snowy day, for I began to lead a busier life and could not wander over to my friend's house to tea nearly so often as I had done before I had entered my 'teens. I was sent first to Queen's College School and then to the College itself, and what with leaving home before 8 a.m. in order to get there (trains ran only once an hour then) and not returning till five in the afternoon, with "homework" to be done later, and new companionships and interests of various kinds, my days were fully occupied. I had four years of this life and then, having developed a voice that was well thought of, I went for a year's training in singing to Berlin, which was at that time considered the hub of the universe in all things relating to music. A great deal happens in the years of life that stretch between thirteen and eighteen. I came back from Germany, or so it seems to me in retrospect, a new girl, though built up on old foundations. The things I wanted now were ideas. And in the 'nineties of last century there were plenty of ideas flying about. There was Bernard Shaw, there was H. G. Wells, there was Oscar Wilde, there was J. M. Barrie—I think we may add "and Company". There

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were women all over the place with what were then regarded as the most heterodox ideas about themselves and most of the other things that appertain to this world of ours. Discussion, passionate argument, was in fashion. Ibsen was in the air and translations of Tolstoi and Turgenev and Dostoievsky were coming to the fore. I remember seeing a one-act play by Zola that shocked me at eighteen just as Morris had shocked me some six or seven years earlier. I have always found it difficult to accept the truths of this world when they are put before me in entirely plain, uncompromising language; I like to have them presented by a competent *chef* who can fuse his materials into a palatable dish, of which one can partake without suffering a fit of indigestion afterwards. And I found that of all the cooks then serving their meals of ideas so liberally the one whom I would have least expected to provide anything to my taste, William Morris, took the first and foremost place. I could not only accept all of his dishes but could take them into myself holus-bolus, recognizing that the staple ingredient in them was the truth. And so I came under his influence not only for that time but apparently for all time—I mean, of course, for all *my* time. On the very first occasion on which I went to one of his Sunday evening lectures in order to test something I had been told about I felt that he was speaking truth; I felt that if only we would all behave as he would have us behave we *could* have a world, a real world, worth the having. Yes, I came under his influence then and it has lingered with me to this day. He is one of three men, none of whom I knew in the least intimately, whose spoken words have had power to modify my thoughts and so to change my life in some degree. The other two were

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John Galsworthy and Gaetano Salvemini, but both of these I met at a much later date. I was still young and malleable when it was given to me to listen to William Morris.

I do not remember by what route I went to these Sunday evening meetings in the stable of the Hammer-smith house but I well remember attending them. It was only when Morris himself was reading a paper that I cared to go, and I imagine that a good many other people, much older and abler than I, were similarly drawn, for the place was always crammed when it was his night to speak; those of us who were unable to find seats would stand in the aisles and at the back of the building. Morris sat on the platform, a quite simple structure, and from there delivered to us his views on life, without raising his voice or having recourse to any of the orator's tricks. I have described his voice, when he was speaking to the working men in the snow, as round and rough and sonorous, and so it was, but when he was addressing his very mixed audience in the stable, it was a different voice. As I say, he hardly raised it and there was no trace of "sentiment" in it; he just put his convictions before us and left us to decide on them as we would. He could not really be considered a good speaker, judged by the usual standards of what a good speaker should be. He would read his paper almost without lifting his eyes from the manuscript before him and with no emphasis of any kind, and yet we listened eagerly and he caught us all in his net, as fishermen catch their fish. I couldn't say exactly what it was that made us swim so directly into it. I suppose it was just because he was speaking the truth and we felt it to be the truth; it came from the depths of something in him and pene-

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trated to the kindred something that exists in each one of us and so prevailed.

No meetings that I ever attended in my later life seem to me to have been like those, and I do not think this impression of mine is due to my having been at that time quite unaccustomed to attend "meetings" of any kind, though I had been an assiduous frequenter of theatres and concerts and operas. Nor do I think that the "I" who is writing now, very different as it no doubt is from the "I" who sat listening with fascinated ears to what Morris was saying, exaggerates the impression he made. I have an idea that many of those who were present at his lectures felt as I did and would agree with me that no other lectures ever affected them in the same way. He was able to communicate to us—what am I to call it?—a picture of his mind and his soul. It was a bit of his essential life that he presented to us and so, though he undoubtedly did say extremely practical things in his lectures, the effect he produced, at any rate for me, was poetical rather than practical. He set before us a vision of the sort of life that anyone with a morsel of the artistic build in him would like to lead and to see his fellow men leading. It seemed a simple proposition (not so very unlike that of the early Christians) and we took it in as naturally as we might take in our breakfast; and why we didn't go home and put its precepts into practice for the rest of our days I fancy none of us could have explained. It seemed so easy when one was listening; it proved so difficult when one came to try and do it. Did Morris entirely practise his own theories? I doubt it, and I do not think he would make any claim to having done so. *Can* such theories be put into practice here? Who knows? We have been trying for some thousands of

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years and haven't got there yet. Perhaps this world is meant to be what it so patently is for most of us—a trial. Still it is something to know that someone once spoke as Morris spoke and carried conviction to at least some part of one.

The audience at these lectures was a motley one. There were all sorts and conditions of men and women there. I remember one evening specially because I could see from the good seat that I had come early to secure, a number of people well known in the literary and artistic circles of the day. Among them was Walter Crane, looking just as you would expect him to look if you were an admirer of his work, and a very charming face he had. Then, a little way round, I caught sight of Bernard Shaw not seated but leaning against the wall, close to the door. His face came out very distinctly in the unshaded light of the stable-room, and as he listened it seemed to me to be lit up not only by that outside light but also, and in a more particular way, by some inner lamp, as if Morris's words had lighted a candle of great and incandescent power within him. Shaw's face that night burned itself in on me; I have never seen any face like it since. Its expression was as clear and incisive as one of his own prefaces; his eyes were fixed on the lecturer, and it was obvious that when the lecture was finished he would have something to say about it and something that would be worth listening to, even if one passionately disagreed with every word of it. His pale skin, his hair that the light above it turned to gold, and his strong, gleaming teeth, made a picture that no one, I think, could forget. If Morris, when he spoke, seemed to give you a bit of himself, Shaw on such occasions handed out to you morsels of his brain. He bestowed them on you

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freely, for your pleasure or your profit, and you left the meeting with this or that piece of his mind firmly in your possession, to do what you liked with.

Oscar Wilde was there too on that evening, and if a discussion had arisen as to whether a complete unlikeness can exist between two human beings of the same race, Shaw and Wilde might have been taken as illustrations of such a possibility. Shaw, standing there in the crowd and making one of them, yet looked as if he were alone, surrounded by nothing but space. He seemed a bit of pure Calvinism, a chapter of the "Institutes" come to life and ready to deliver its message to us. Oscar Wilde was equally distinctive in his own way, but that way was so inherently different from Shaw's that the epithet "human" seemed hardly applicable to both. The comparison I am about to make is, I know, an absurd one, but what Oscar Wilde reminded me of on that night was a basket of fruit, ripe and enticing, bulging over the basket-edge and dropping some of its juices on to the floor. He was wearing in his buttonhole, if I may trust the picture that my mind's eye gives me, a very large dahlia, crimson and beautiful in its amplitude but not what one would expect to find on a man's coat. Shaw simply couldn't have worn it; if he had put it in *his* buttonhole it would have died a natural death in self-defence. There was another writer in our company that evening, the Russian refugee Stepniak, as he called himself, a small dark man who, like so many of those present, was bent on regenerating the world, and somehow it was then borne in upon me that "writers", whom I had previously classed compendiously just as "people who wrote", might hold and uphold the most divergent and irreconcilable views among themselves. And I re-

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member how, when I left the lecture-hall and got outside, where the coloured leaves were dropping languidly from the trees and the river was flowing on its quiet way, I began to wonder which of the regenerated worlds I, a raw and inexperienced girl, would choose if the choice were open to me—Shaw's or Stepniak's. Different as these were in detail, life in both of them would have moved, I think, more or less in the same key. Or would I find the drawing-room society of Oscar Wilde's world, where everyone is witty and such things as time and common sense do not seem to exist, more to my liking? I came to the conclusion that none of these three worlds would be to my liking; two of them would be too hard and fast for me and the other wouldn't be hard and fast enough. And what of Morris's "Nowhere"? Would one be happy there? Would it not pall after a while and would "art" really thrive and play a valid part in such a community? For art surely lives on pain as well as on joy, and if we were always content and had nothing to wish for, *would* we write and paint and compose as we now, in this most imperfect world of ours, still endeavour to do? I think that as I walked home on that autumn night the idea came to me that this world is *something* after all, something that we have to go through—and perhaps many times—before we can pass on to . . . somewhere else. When Morris, just after emerging from Nowhere, encountered on his homeward way the unlovely, ragged, toilworn figure of the man who, in passing, "touched his hat with some real goodwill and courtesy and much servility", did he, I wonder, feel any touch of what I am trying to suggest? He had left behind him the beautiful dinner-table in the church and the diners round about it, "looking like a bed of tulips in the sun".

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One could hardly light upon such a scene as that here and now, and I question if one could have done so even in the medieval world in which Morris was so amazingly at home. Some faint suggestion of it may have been realized for a moment here and there by a favoured few, but the background of the picture must even then have been one of labour and suffering and strife. Our world has always had to have its tragic side and it seems likely to keep on having it to the end. Otherwise, I suppose, we should grow satiated in our ease and become bored; and to be genuinely bored is perhaps the worst thing that can happen to man. Nowhere would be a perfect place for an occasional holiday but not many of us, I imagine, would be happy there for life. We mortals, we who are so much more ordinary than William Morris, need the minor key in the music of life; we can't be joyful all the time. Yes, I remember that walk of mine so many years ago. By the time I reached home—I had a couple of miles or so to go from Hammersmith to Chiswick—I felt completely bamboozled; I didn't know what I thought. And I daresay I am not much further on even now. I certainly cannot *explain* anything, and I doubt if Morris himself could do that, though I hope and think he would have understood what I have been trying so inadequately to express here and would not have taken it amiss.

3

I think that any account of William Morris, however sketchy, should at least make some mention of his elder daughter, May, who so completely identified herself with his ideas and his work. She gave over the whole of

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herself to this father of hers; I have never known anyone who could so suppress the egoistic self as she seemed to me to do. She was, at any rate in appearance, a personality in her own right; it would hardly have been possible to overlook so striking a figure anywhere. But she was apparently quite unaware of this; she gave one the impression of being wholly unconscious of herself. It seems odd that she should ever have looked at herself in the glass and remained thus unconscious, but so it was.

My own impressions of her were really formed in two quite brief and casual encounters with her when I merely played the part of onlooker. I did meet her once or twice on other occasions but not so as to draw near her in any way, whereas the impressions I have spoken of have left a lasting memory with me. The first of them was made when I was still a schoolgirl, returning from Queen's College with a strap of books under my arm and waiting on the platform of the Charing Cross station for the train to take me home. Glancing from where I stood to the other end of the platform I recognized May Morris at some distance from me, waiting for the same train. Consequently I had the chance of observing her with detachment and I saw that she was a picture in herself, something—though the schoolgirl could not have told you this—that had walked out of a Rossetti canvas into what we call real life. The photographic machinery that we all carry about with us somewhere inside ourselves took a snapshot of her there and then which has remained unfaded to this day. Very beautiful she looked to the girl who surveyed her. She wore a "princess" dress, such as we all wore in the later years of last century, and this dress had a train which she had caught up and thrown over her arm. She had no hat; her thick, dark, crinkly hair

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formed a sort of head-dress of its own, and she was carrying a basket which she held, hanging downwards, by its loose handles. I think the most arresting thing about her, though the schoolgirl did not, I imagine, phrase the matter to herself in these terms, was her complete unself-consciousness. No canvas of Rossetti's, depicting her, could have been less selfconscious than she herself was.

I must have been in my early 'teens when I received this first impression, and my second impression did not come to me till some years later. In the course of those intervening years much had happened in May Morris's life. She had married a man who has always been described to me as "a workman" but I have never had the curiosity to ask what kind of "work" it was that he did. I suppose he worked with his hands but not, evidently, as William Morris worked, and it is hardly to be wondered at that the marriage did not prove a success. We human beings are all human but I think no one will contradict me if I say that we are not all precisely on the same level of humanity. This Mr. Sparling had apparently been brought up in a milieu entirely different from that in which May Morris had matured. Theories are one thing, facts another, and she probably acted most sensibly when she left this husband and returned to her father's house at Hammersmith—and to the use of her maiden name. I imagine that the incident which had been a husband soon dropped into the background and life resumed its normal course for her.

Changes must surely have taken place inside her in the course of those years but to my eyes, when I saw her on the second occasion, there was no essential difference in her outwardly. She was still the beautiful, statuesque figure of the railway platform, so beautiful that her sur-

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roundings did not seem to matter. I had just come out of a club hall where Morris had been giving a lecture. I do not now remember on what subject he had been speaking but I had been, as I always was, moved by his words, and their effect upon me remains with me still, while other lectures to which I have listened with interest and of which I could repeat passages and give a coherent summary have had no such influence on me at all. May Morris, as I made my way out of the hall to the street, was standing in a recess at the left hand of the exit door. She had at her feet a large basket full of printed matter and held in her hand two or three copies of the current issue of the magazine of which this printed matter consisted. The magazine was *The Commonweal*, the organ of the Socialist League formed by Morris and his party; it was edited by Morris for some years and largely financed by him. May Morris, on selling the loose copies she had in her hand, stooped and picked another batch of them out of the basket, and as she did so, she repeated in a voice not exactly musical but clear and ringing, "Commonweal! Commonweal! One penny!" She seemed to me, as I looked back and observed her, to sell a copy to nearly everyone who came out. I suppose that when she was finished the basket would be empty.

On both the occasions of which I have spoken the impression she left on me was of someone who had "given herself away", as the saying is. And the thing to which she had given herself, though I did not realize this at the time, was her father's idea, her father's reading of life, which she had adopted without perhaps very clearly understanding it. I daresay she never deliberately considered the matter any more than the dog who has set his affections on you consciously weighs and measures

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what you are. Where William Morris was, there May Morris would be if she could. She took no leading part in whatever might be going on; she was simply there—a presence ready to be at her father's beck and call, faithful to any service that she undertook. She was swallowed up in her father and yet seemed to be all the more herself for being thus absorbed. It seems to me that happiness in this life can only be found by thus losing oneself, all of oneself, in something that one feels to be greater than oneself. Men can attain this by losing themselves in an idea, something that would make, they believe, for the greater happiness of humanity. But women—or a woman or two here and there—can lose themselves in someone else's idea, taking it on not for its own sake but because it belongs to this someone else who holds it. May Morris had, I think, this happiness.

I need only add that in this relation between father and daughter there never for a moment seemed to me to be anything in the smallest degree off the bias, so to speak; it was a perfectly normal bond between one human being and another. There was assuredly no trace of "passion" in it; I do not believe that Freud himself could have convicted either of them of a grain of such a thing. They always struck me as two workers who worked so much in unison that it was difficult to think of the one without the other. It was a beautiful and entirely healthy connection but I sometimes had the feeling that for her there was about it something—if I say "barren" I overstress what I wish to suggest but I cannot think of a better epithet. She was really more an onlooker on life than a partaker of it. Her father did the creative work and she "helped". Is that enough? I wonder. I do not doubt that each of them loved the other

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but it was with a solid practical love in which the sentiment that we usually associate with the word "love" played little part. To be quite honest, William Morris has always been something of an enigma to me in relation to that sentiment. It is evident enough in his poems and romances that he had a strong streak of what we call romantic love in his composition, or would it be more accurate to say that he wanted to have that streak? For if we compare his always somewhat distant handling of the theme with the forthright treatment given it by Shakespeare, for example, we see what a difference there is, and may perhaps get a clue to what was lacking in the love side. Morris certainly *seemed* to be forthright, and I suppose he was so in some ways but he was always, I suspect, more or less withdrawn also. I have only glanced at one aspect of him here. There are scores of others from which he might be examined but I should be incapable of dealing with them even if I wished to. He brought into my life, when I was a girl, something I have been conscious of and grateful for, ever since, and I have satisfied a long-standing desire in paying this little tribute to his memory.

Recollections of
Mrs. Oliphant



Recollections of Mrs. Oliphant

I

Among the many Victorian novelists to whom, at any rate in their own day, the epithet "eminent" might not unfairly be applied, Mrs. Oliphant would readily, I think, be granted a place. Her first published book, written when she was scarcely out of her 'teens, was immediately welcomed by the reading public, and for some sixty years thereafter her literary output (which included, besides fiction, a mass of biography, history, criticism and miscellaneous essays) continued without cessation and was received with general acceptance and applause. At her very start she won the praise of the aged but still very influential critic, Francis Jeffrey; Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, neither of them too easy to please, approved of and enjoyed much of her work; A. W. Kinglake and Laurence Oliphant admired it greatly; and when she died in 1897, J. M. Barrie paid her a warm and generous tribute, giving her tales of Scottish life and character a high place in the fiction of the nineteenth century. Many Victorian authors are being taken into favour again after a long period of eclipse and I should not be altogether surprised if Mrs. Oliphant were invited one of these days to join their company on the strength of perhaps three or four of her books. In any case she was an interesting as well as a very talented

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woman and I think that even such fragmentary personal recollections of her as my memory retains are well worth putting on paper, for merely as a character, as a human being, the web of whose life was of a curiously mingled yarn, she might well engage the attention of any modern psychologist. These recollections are drawn not only from my own youthful remembrances of her but also, and to a larger extent, from my mother's tales of her at an even earlier date. Mrs. Oliphant—her first name, Margaret, was rarely used in speaking of her and to call her by it would seem to me something of a liberty—and my mother were cousins, though not in the first degree; they were daughters of two first cousins and the maiden name of both was Wilson. The connection between them was drawn closer by the marriage of one of Mrs. Oliphant's brothers to my mother's favourite sister but I doubt if the intimacy between them became any firmer in consequence. It was never a really cordial one; they were made in different moulds and when you tried to put them together, they didn't fit.

My own first encounter with Mrs. Oliphant took place at Windsor when I was perhaps eight or nine years old. She was already getting on in life then and certainly seemed "old" to my childish vision. I had been taken to Windsor to see the two cousins of mine who were living with her then but I do not remember her speaking directly to me on this occasion. My mother and I were "spending the day" in the old-fashioned style, and after our midday meal in the nursery we children—I a good deal the youngest of the trio—were, as the Victorian convention dictated, taken for a walk. It was winter and there had been a fall of snow, and upon its unsoiled expanses the sun shone glitteringly. I suppose I must have

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felt much as little dogs do in such a scene; at any rate I suggested that we should roll in the snow and promptly suited my action to the word. My companions followed my lead. I do not know what the nurse can have been about to permit such goings-on; possibly her "young man" lived hard by the spot. I do know, however, that when we got home again we were drenched through with wet snow. I suppose it *was* I who had tempted the others; anyhow, it was evident that everyone thought so, and I saw that my mother was annoyed. I had assuredly meant no harm. The country snow, in its first freshness, had seemed lovely to me, a town-dweller who had never until that afternoon seen snow in such a shining expanse, and I had had the child's desire to feel it. And now, when we got back, everyone was angry and seemed to think it was my fault—and where were the dry clothes to come from, that I needed to go home in? I felt I was both a criminal and a bother, and the expression of Mrs. Oliphant's eye as I was led away to be provided with the dry clothes, seemed to me cold, critical and unsympathetic. It said, "I didn't and don't like your mother and I don't like you either". So, at least, I unconsciously interpreted it then, but when I recall my last two or three meetings with this remarkable woman (for Mrs. Oliphant as a woman was, to my mind, far more remarkable than her books, attractive and readable as many of these were and still are) and the feeling of deep sympathy, a sympathy emanating from her whole being, that she threw out to me on these occasions, I realize how ridiculous, how ludicrous those childish impressions of mine were. There are all sorts of wrong notes that may be struck in life, just as there are in music, and one of those wrong notes sounded between her and

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me on that winter's day at Windsor. Before our last meeting I had found the right "key", and I never was more entirely in sympathy with anyone than I was with her when we parted, not to meet again. I often think of her as I saw her then—a woman of sorrows, if ever woman was, and acquainted with grief; but her sorrows she kept to herself, though in her *Autobiography* she gave more than a hint of her dissatisfaction with life. I have always thought that her own "true story" would make a better tale than any of her novels, if only someone could write it.

2

Possibly the emphasis laid by Mrs. Oliphant in her later life, not perhaps exactly on luxury, but at least on a comfort that bordered on elegance and cost a lot to keep up, had its origin in the extreme simplicity, not to say bareness, of her childish surroundings. My mother, who went at intervals to see those family connections of hers, described their domestic arrangements as simple in the severer sense of the word. The house, situated in the environs of Edinburgh (I think at Musselburgh, but I will not swear to that) was small and "unhandy", as the Scotch would say, and it was meagrely furnished. It was evident that money was scarce there and that nobody expected to be particularly comfortable. What the head of the household did to earn a living my mother was never clear about; she belonged to that now extinct species of the human race that considered it a breach of manners to inquire directly what a person "did". She could only say that she *thought* little Margaret Wilson's father was "something in the Customs". He was, ac-

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according to her account of him, an innocuous human creature, who sat by the fire and said at intervals to his bustling wife, "Margit, is it no' time for my glass yet?" He did not "drink" but the "glass"—of whisky or toddy or whatever it might be that she provided for him at stated intervals—stood for his main interest in life. My mother declared that she never heard him give forth any other remark than the one I have quoted—an evening remark, I presume, when he had come back from his work and was taking his ease by the fireside.

"Margit" was a good deal younger than he; she was a woman of deep religious convictions and extremely capable in her everyday life, and she would certainly lead her only daughter into very straight ways of thought. But for some reason unknown to me, possibly scarcity of money, little Margaret was never sent to school. Any education that she got—I rely again on my mother's report—came from the brother who was nearest to her in age. Actually he must, I think, have been some eight or ten years older, for she had come rather as an unexpected postscript to the family line, and he took a great fancy to her from the beginning, carrying her about in his arms when she was a baby. One of Mrs. Oliphant's earliest memories (and those memories of hers went back an extraordinarily long way) was of being carried in this brother's arms into the night, where he would stand and show her the stars in the olive-black sky, naming such of them as he could identify and asking her if "they were na bonnie". Is it remarkable that the baby girl, when grown up to womanhood, should harbour a little jealousy against anyone who might come between her and her brother Frank? I think not. Indeed I have sometimes thought that in her childish alliance with this

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brother she came nearer to another human being than she ever succeeded in doing in her later life.

Frank Wilson's own education must have been limited enough but he had a passion for reading and he evidently had an unusual capacity for absorbing knowledge. When my mother came to know him intimately, after his marriage with her favourite sister, he always made on her the impression of a cultivated man. When little Margaret had taught herself to read (and no one could remember exactly how or when she did so, but it was at an astonishingly early age) he shared with her such book learning as he had at his disposal. He read to her everything he could lay hands on in the shape of printed matter—prose or verse—and Mrs. Oliphant must have had from the start a very remarkable gift for receiving and assimilating anything that interested her. She imbibed knowledge as grass does moisture and, I imagine, almost as unconsciously. For instance, she had no chances in her early days of striking up an acquaintance with French, and I remember my mother's speaking to me of her own astonishment on being told that Mrs. Oliphant had written a life of Montalembert. "How could she? She knows no French," she had exclaimed to her informant. But my mother was wrong. Mrs. Oliphant had never perhaps a scholar's knowledge of French and Italian but in her visits to France and Italy she quickly made herself so far mistress of these languages as to be able to converse fluently in them and read widely in their literatures. These visits were made after her marriage, which took place some three years after the appearance—and success—of her first novel. I remember my mother's explaining to me that "he" was Margaret Wilson's cousin. Francis Wilson Oliphant was his name,

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and M.O.W.O. became in her later life a familiar signature to Mrs. Oliphant's letters and sometimes to her published articles. Her husband, youthful like herself, was by profession a designer of stained-glass windows, and I was given to understand that the only sample of his work to be seen was in a church in one of England's southern counties and that it was "artistic". When my mother told me facts like this I listened, but I was never interested enough to ask further questions, and therefore I know nothing of the impulse that led Margaret Wilson to marry him. She was at all times, I fancy, a hard person to know; she was both complicated and reserved. It is impossible for me to imagine her *introducing* herself to anyone; I should doubt if she was completely unreserved even with herself. She was very Scotch in her make-up, with an immense latent capacity for affection, which manifested itself in her feeling for her children, and in her loyalty to her friends, but I doubt if the sentiments that we are fond of ascribing to an ardent lover were ever very strong in her. I have sometimes thought that one reason for my mother's never being able to get on with this cousin of hers (and vice versa) may have been a difference not only in their temperaments but in their respective attitudes to the world. My mother had much of the Puritan in her but at the same time she was extremely, I might almost say entirely, unconventional in her worldly ideals. Mrs. Oliphant, though not really Puritanical at all (she loved comfort, as I have said, and even luxury, up to a point, and she was aesthetic in her own rather limited way) was in all her ideas, her manners, and her morals conventional to the last degree. There are all sorts of artistic types, and she certainly did not belong to the Baudelaire type nor yet to the type

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which, under cover of the outward observances of convention, hides a good deal of freedom both in thought and in conduct. However deeply you might have dug down into her ideas of life you would never have come to anything that might have shocked you, for it simply wasn't there. This was one reason, I think, for the immense popularity of her books; nothing that could have shocked anyone was to be read either in or between their lines. In Victorian times that was a great asset, and I fancy that even in our so changed world of to-day there is a larger public than some of us would admit, which doesn't *want* to be shocked by the books it reads for entertainment. At any rate it was fortunate for her that she could count upon a sympathetic public then, for she was soon to stand sorely in need of such a support.

After her marriage with her cousin in 1852 it was she who worked and kept the household going. In the time that had elapsed between the publication of her first book and this marriage she had gone on writing, and in the years following her marriage it was not only books that she produced but babies too. Her first child, a girl, was born in 1853; another daughter, born a year or so later, lived for only eight months, and 1856 saw the birth of her first son, Cyril. Thus where there had at the start been only two human creatures to house and clothe and feed, there were now four, indeed five, for a nurse, or rather perhaps a "general", was required to look after the children as well as clean and cook for the household. This "general" was the famous "Jane", who struck terror into even so stout a heart as that of my mother. Jane was apparently one of those uncompromising persons who, if they like you, are perfection and if they don't like you are grimly formidable. She didn't take to my

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mother (and so, in later times, made it difficult for her to pay visits to the house) but she was a faithful and stalwart protector of what would then have been called her "Mistress", in whose service she remained through many hard years, in the course of which she became her friend as well as her servant. Mrs. Oliphant had the knack of keeping her servants and of attaching them to herself. She had her faults like the rest of us, but the people who waited on her were not those to whom these faults were visible or by whom they were taken in ill part, and that is a good deal to say for any woman.

It must have been less than a year after the birth of her son that Mrs. Oliphant became alarmed about her husband's health. He had never been robust; he had always seemed to lack the energy to bring such artistic talent as he possessed into effectual action and, as I have said, it was his wife's pen that had kept the family going since their marriage. She, accustomed perhaps to such shortcomings of accomplishment in the menfolk of her own family, had probably looked upon her husband's inactivity as Nature's way and had accepted the post of breadwinner without demur or hesitation. But now, when doctors were consulted for the first time, the situation changed. The unfortunate man was found to be far gone in tuberculosis or, as they no doubt phrased it at that time, "consumption"; indeed it was a "galloping consumption"—something that neither the hand nor the mind of surgeon or physician could cure. His languor, his constant little hacking cough were explained. He was doomed.

The doctors, however, as befitted their office, presented what one can only call suggestions. They said that a climate more suited to the patient than any that

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Britain could offer would be beneficial and *might* even be curative. There seemed nothing to do but to pack up and go in search of sunshine and winter warmth. It is commonly taken for granted that members of the artistic tribe cannot deal with the practical matters of which life is so largely composed, and certainly all down the centuries there have been plenty of dreamy, other-worldly artists, both men and women, to make the legend plausible, but Mrs. Oliphant did not belong to that class. If she had the gift of telling stories that a very large number of ordinary, quite everyday folk liked to read, she also had, stowed away in another drawer of herself and always ready for use, the practical, workaday equipment which every wife must have if she is to succeed in the profession of domesticity. It was a matter of only a few days before everything was arranged; business affairs had been seen to, all that was necessary had been got together and packed, tickets to take the little group of five to Rome had been obtained and the journey had begun. It must be remembered that the leader of the group had had absolutely no experience of travel abroad and that travelling in those days, nearly a century ago, was by no means as easy as it normally is now. She was going to a country the language of which she could not speak; she had two small children and a very sick man to look after, and she was carrying within her what was to be her second son and a third child. I like to think that she had the support of that redoubtable, honest, capable Jane, who was to stand by her in the days to come and who never swerved in the service she had undertaken.

The change from England to Italy came, as in the case of Keats, too late to keep the sufferer "here"—I mean in this world of ours, which can be so beautiful and which

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yet contains so many sorrows. After a few months had passed all that remained of what had been brought to Rome to be cured was something that had to be buried in a place far from home. Margaret Oliphant was, at this crisis of her life, too near her time, as the phrase is, for her to undertake the journey back to Britain. Also, after all the necessary expenses had been met, she found herself with hardly any money and without any relations to whom she could apply with any reasonable hope of receiving assistance. She was still a young woman, and one may well ask, what did she do in this desperate situation? She wrote to her publishers. She explained to them how she had been left in Rome without money to return home or to carry on where she was; all the little surplus that she had brought with her had been eaten up by the expenses of her husband's illness and his recent funeral. She told them of her impending ordeal, pointing out the possibility of her own death at the birth of her child (she had, said my informant, long been apprehensive of the danger that threatened her) and finally she asked for the loan of £200, freely admitting that in the event of her death the lenders would be liable to lose their money, for she knew of nobody who could or would be her surety. But she also pointed out that if she lived she would repay them herself by supplying them with books, articles or anything else they might ask of her in the way of literary work. What must the state of this woman's heart have been after she had posted her letter? Can one imagine it without sympathy and pity and admiration too? What a strait to be in and what courage to cope with it! In a very short time the £200 came with a letter, I believe, that did the heart of the recipient good. Mrs. Oliphant never forgot this act of

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trust and generosity; the Blackwoods and she remained friends to the end of her life, and it is pleasant even to record that a cordial understanding existed between this author and the great publishing house. "Business", like other things, has its romance, and I call this a thoroughly romantic episode. Money "talked" to some purpose there!

3

As soon as the mother and her infant son were fit for travel the little family group—still of five—returned to England. For a time Mrs. Oliphant tried the experiment of making her abode with her brother Frank, now a married man with a family, at Birkenhead, but it did not work out satisfactorily and before long she went back to Scotland. After spending a few months at Elie in Fife, she moved to Edinburgh in 1860 and there she stayed for, I suppose, rather more than a year. It is from her sojourn there that the various details about her which I have recorded and have still to record are very largely derived; they came to me through my mother, who was then living in Edinburgh with *her* mother, and for many of them I have, I fancy, to thank this grandmother of mine. My mother and Mrs. Oliphant, as I have already said, were not close friends; they were never confidential with one another, but Mrs. Oliphant could and did confide in my grandmother and much of what she confided must have filtered down to me through my mother.

The young widow, with her three children and Jane, occupied a small "main-door flat" and basement in Fettes Row. It was, said my mother, a very modest dwelling, and if my mother called it modest it must

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assuredly have been so. It consisted, if I am not mistaken, of two or possibly three rooms, one of which served as the writer's study and bedroom, the other as a nursery by day and a sleeping-place for Jane and the children by night. I have an idea that this sojourn in Edinburgh may have been one of the most enjoyable times in Mrs. Oliphant's life. She was passionately devoted to her children; she had for them the passionate kind of love that is fraught with danger. The loss of one whom you love in this fashion means the loss of part of yourself, and Mrs. Oliphant was to know it only too often later, but here in her little house I think she was content and could carry on her work with a good heart. I am sure that her children played happily round about her feet as she wrote and were no disturbance to her. They were her own, all her own, and the consciousness of being an all-provider, an absolute necessity for them, would be a source of deep, though perhaps unacknowledged, gratification to her. She must by now have felt a definite assurance of her own talent and have known that she could do what she had undertaken to do. Is there in life—I will not say a "happier" but a more comforting assurance than that?

She was always a writer but during this period she probably worked harder than ever, and so she had little time for outside diversions of any kind. She had, or so I gathered from my mother's account of her, few friends, and one of her chief relaxations was to walk out on Sunday afternoons (when my mother was engaged in teaching at her Sunday School) to see my grandmother, to whom she had taken a great fancy. Long afterwards—on the last occasion on which I saw her—she said to me, "During my life I have known many clever and some

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able women, but I have only met one woman with genius, and that was your grandmother." This grandmother lived with my mother, who was then unmarried, in a pleasant house at Morningside. I never saw her, for she died years before I came into the world, but from all I have heard of her she must have been a very original old lady, extremely intelligent and with a most aesthetically sensitive temperament. And if Mrs. Oliphant took to her, she on her side accepted this young relation of hers heart and soul. She had lost her husband long before this time, and of the eleven children she had borne only three now remained. Difference of age proved no barrier between these two women, and I can imagine them sitting in the old dining-room with its broad bay-window looking out across the garden to Blackford Hill and exchanging bits of themselves with one another. My grandmother was rather deaf but her young friend somehow contrived to make her hear all that she had to say. Even in her old age Mrs. Oliphant retained a very charming voice, which must, I think, have been one of her chief attractions in her youth. I have always had the impression that this friendship with my grandmother counted for a good deal in Mrs. Oliphant's life.

She left Edinburgh towards the end of 1861 and went to the London suburb of Ealing, where she stayed for some three years. In 1863 she took her three children to Rome, and there the eldest of them, her daughter Maggie, suddenly fell ill and died. This was a terrible blow to her and I do not think she ever wholly recovered from it. She did not come back to England until 1865, spending the intervening time in various parts of Italy and Switzerland and finally at Paris. On her return to London she took the house at Windsor in which she was to

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pass pretty well all the rest of her life. It was not a large house, and as the years went on she must, I suppose, have found it somewhat cramped, for she bought the adjoining house and made the two into one by knocking down walls and other architectural operations. That is how I myself recall it—with all the advantages and disadvantages that such a procedure is apt to bring with it. The two original houses were not new when she took possession of them; they had what I may call the “experienced” look which houses that have been lived in by a succession of families generally acquire. And when thus reconstructed they certainly presented a most attractive set of rooms, in which Mrs. Oliphant’s vivid personality was very pleasantly illustrated. I have a clear and unforgettable picture of her as she sat in her drawing-room, surrounded by the mementos she had brought back with her from her travels abroad and playing the part of hostess with an unobtrusive distinction that was all her own. But that was many years after she had settled in Windsor Crescent, and before I speak of it I must say something of events that occurred in the earlier years of her residence there.

4

Once Mrs. Oliphant had established herself in London she held little communication, I think, with her Edinburgh relations. She would probably write occasionally to my grandmother but after the latter’s death she would have little desire to keep in touch with my mother, who remained in Edinburgh and led an independent life for several years before she married. A few years after her marriage, however, my father and she and I (for I had

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appeared upon the scene by this time) went to London and settled there, and though the two cousins might not have made any approach to each other even then, they were before very long brought together again over a family incident that affected both of them very painfully and made it necessary for them to co-operate in their efforts to remedy its consequences. I wish I could pass this incident over in silence but it cannot be ignored in any personal record of Mrs. Oliphant, for it led to her estrangement from the brother who had held her in his arms when she was a baby and had shown her the great company of stars.

This brother, as I have already indicated, had always had an aesthetic fibre in his composition and apparently he was not always able to control it. He had to have comfortable surroundings; he liked the good things of the table; he wanted his wife, of whom he was genuinely fond, to be dressed with the best; he was a loving father and wished his four children to have all the advantages that had been denied to him in his youth. The fly in this box of ointment was an inadequate income, for his post as bank accountant, though no doubt an honourable, was not a lucrative one. His wife was too gentle to hold him in check when the spending mood ran away with him. I never saw her, but from the expression of her face in a daguerrotype of her that my mother had I formed the opinion that she could never have denied anything to anyone whom she loved. Thus though she doubtless worried over the debts incurred by her husband, she could do nothing to bring them to a stop. Mrs. Oliphant naturally enough blamed her sister-in-law for what happened, and my mother, no less naturally, thought that Frank Wilson was wholly responsible for it. "How

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could your Aunt Jeanie help it?" I have heard her say. "Her husband *spent* the money without consulting her; she had no voice in the matter."

Things came to a crisis when a note that Frank Wilson had signed for a friend as guarantee for a considerable sum of money was about to fall due and no settlement of it was in prospect. I fancy that this friend's failure to keep faith with him was a crushing blow to him and that he lost his head for the time being; we all do sometimes, I suppose, lose our heads in certain emergencies. Why, he probably argued with himself, should he not take from the bank the sum of money he needed and replace it when his salary, which was shortly due, was paid him? At any rate he acted on this plan; the abstraction of the money was discovered and the bank prosecuted. Losing his head still more disastrously, he took to his heels, fled to his sister and told her what he had done. She gave him asylum and Jane, her faithful henchwoman, was the only other human being let into the secret. There and then, I imagine, these two women discussed together how they could find an outlet from this desperate predicament.

They formed their plan but had not carried it fully out when it was held up by the arrival of the police, who came to the house after nightfall and rang the front-door bell. But they were prepared for this emergency. Jane went to the door, listened to what the men had to say, and told them that she would fetch her mistress. Mrs. Oliphant then presented herself to them and held them in conversation until Jane had had time to conduct the refugee to the back door and let him out. He escaped, taking with him all the money that his sister could spare, and when the police were invited to enter the house and

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search for the culprit, they found nothing. He was making his way south to the coast so that he might board any vessel that would carry him across the English Channel and land him on the other side. He did get safely over to France, where he was subsequently joined by his wife and daughters. Meanwhile Mrs. Oliphant, who had been in correspondence with the authorities at the bank, squared accounts with them and the prosecution was called off.

Shortly afterwards Frank Wilson was offered a post of some sort in Hungary and thither the little party of five proceeded. What his job was I do not know but it was connected with some big railway enterprise that was then being carried out there. In any case he did not keep it long, for still more trouble was waiting for him round the corner. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly his wife died of what was then still called a "putrid fever". He was absent from his home at the time, and I remember my mother's telling me how the strangers who laid out her corpse had stolen her clothes and the very rings from her fingers. In that distant and alien land she was buried, and her husband and the two girls came back to England and were given shelter, on their arrival, in the houses of their two aunts. But Frank Wilson was a broken man for the rest of his life and never attempted to pull himself together again. He stayed on at Windsor Crescent with his sister, but arrangements had to be made for the disposal and upkeep of the children, and it was then that my mother and her cousin were forced not only into intimate communication with each other but into a sort of unwilling alliance that continued for the rest of their lives. They acted as joint guardians to the children. The eldest of these, Frank, stayed with Mrs. Oliphant but my

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mother's brother, Daniel Wilson, then a professor at the University of Toronto, defrayed the expenses of getting him educated and setting him out in the world, while the charge of the three girls was divided between their two aunts.

The old, friendly relations between Mrs. Oliphant and her brother were never renewed. She could never quite pardon his lapse from rectitude or find any pleasure in his presence at Windsor Crescent, and he—the competent accountant and cultivated man, as my mother always called him—turned into a silent, listless looker-on at life, or perhaps just into a prematurely old human creature who sat in his chair, unobservant and more or less ignored by the other inmates of the house. I remember how once my mother, on returning from what was probably a business visit to Windsor, said to me, “No one was more angry at Frank Wilson than I when he disgraced his wife and children. But to-day, when I saw him in his sister's house, alone, silent, neglected by everyone, and uncomplaining, I pitied him.” She paused and then said, “I think he has expiated his folly.” And after another pause she added, “Never be afraid of forgiving one who has done you a wrong. Nothing is so bad that one can't condone it.”

5

When my mother took me on that first expedition of mine to Windsor Crescent, she was no doubt paying one of her periodical visits there to discuss business affairs with her fellow-guardian. As I have already related, I did not make a success of it on that occasion and I was not invited to accompany her there on her future visits.

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Indeed it was not until after my return from a year's stay in Berlin, where I had been studying music, that I had my next view of Mrs. Oliphant, and by that time I was no longer a child eager to roll in the snow but a young woman of eighteen, entering life. The special occasion which I now wish to recall was that on which I spent a couple of nights at Windsor Crescent when I acted as bridesmaid at the wedding of my cousin, Frank Wilson's second daughter, who was then living with Mrs. Oliphant. I had not been looking forward to this visit with any expectations of rapturous enjoyment, but I had hardly arrived at my destination before I felt that this time the atmosphere was going to be a friendly one. I was received kindly and told that there was to be a dinner in the evening; and at that dinner I was seated next the "best man", a young university professor. Before the meal was over he and I had become friends, and Mrs. Oliphant was not unaware of the fact. And either on that evening or on the next day I met the mature and experienced woman who was to become for a time my best friend, a woman who aroused in me an admiring devotion such as I have never felt for any other, and who bestowed on me a kind of affection that I have never received from anyone else. We took to each other at first sight, as must have been evident to any observant onlooker, and as she happened to be a close friend and a beloved *protégée* of our hostess, our mutual attraction may have done something to change the status of one of us in Mrs. Oliphant's mind. Anyhow I was conscious that I was no longer, in her estimation, the daughter of a woman whom she disliked nor the tiresome child who had upset her household but someone capable of enlisting the interest of a rather brilliant young "intellectual"

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and of a distinguished woman of the world. Nothing explicit passed between us but I felt the change in her and enjoyed to the full everything that was to be enjoyed. Whether my mother, who was present at the wedding on the following day along with my father, quite liked the rather novel position I had assumed at Windsor Crescent I don't know; she was certainly relieved that I had not disgraced myself but possibly she may have had a slight feeling that I had gone over to the enemy. Human nature is a ticklish thing and ancient feelings can't be obliterated all at once. The fact remains that I saw in Mrs. Oliphant on this occasion a gracious hostess, a very kind aunt, and a woman who, while she understood a great many of the complex workings within us that make this world of ours go round in the way it does, yet remained curiously ignorant of the very existence of others, different but perhaps equally important. Let me try to give a picture of her, partly as I recall her sitting in her drawing-room that evening so many, many years ago, and partly as she has imaged herself in my mind's eye from the accounts of her given me by my mother and others who knew her well.

There was nothing narrow or provincial about her; she seemed to me to belong quite definitely to the *grande monde*. She always, as I remember her, dressed in black and always very plainly but it was evident, to those who could see, that neither the material nor the cut of what she wore had come in by the back door. Without the slightest pretension she always looked well-dressed. Her hair was neatly drawn under a net cap (all self-respecting ladies wore caps in the earlier and up to the mid-Victorian times) and her feet, small and slender, were always neatly shod. She had a trick, when seated and in

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company, of crossing one knee over the other and keeping the crossed foot, the shoe of which protruded from the full Victorian skirt, in a ceaseless state of nervous vibration. This rapid, undulating movement was apt, as the hours went by, to have an upsetting effect upon any other nervous persons who were in sight of it. "Never," my mother used to say to me, "*never* cross your legs and work off your nervous excitement by swaying your foot round and round. You can spoil the enjoyment of everyone present by such a trick." Mrs. Oliphant gave no other indication of the nervous tension from which she must, I suppose, have suffered. She would sit quite motionless except for the quick glances of her dark penetrating eyes here and there, her small figure ensconced in a low, castored, chintz-covered "lady's" Victorian easy-chair, and from there she would unobtrusively direct the conversation the way it should go. She was no great talker herself; she never entered into long harangues but she would insinuate herself into the conversation from time to time with an apt observation and so give it a turn and keep it from faltering. She had a most unusual power of leaving open to any person who shared in any discussion plenty of room in which to air his opinions; and she herself could argue without losing her temper and could take a home-thrust good-humouredly, provided that she liked the home-thruster. I suppose it was this readiness to listen, combined with her capacity for expressing herself, not exactly eloquently but brightly and intelligently, that made her, especially in her later life, so great a favourite with men. I do not think that they fell in love with her or had any special temptation even to approach the edge of love's uneasy domain but they admired her (though she was not in any way "good

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looking”) and liked to be with her. She entertained them and, I think, inspired in them a feeling of friendship, and this sentiment she reciprocated at least up to a point. She was a loyal and devoted friend; once you “had” her as such, you had her for life. There were many people who felt for her—was it friendship or was it rather devotion and gratitude?—and with good cause, for no one was more generous than she to the human creatures whom she found round about her. Her house was like one of those we read of in the old Russian novels; it was a home for helpless or discomfited bits of humanity of all sorts and kinds. She herself was capable of deep affection, of devotion in its most accentuated form, but somehow I boggle a little at applying the word “friendship” to her relations with the men and women even of her inner circle. I could never, once I was mature enough to give my own intuitions free scope, rid myself of the feeling that although surrounded by those who respected and admired and loved her, she was yet one of the loneliest women I have ever met. She saw much company but she was always essentially alone, perpetually writing her books, sometimes out of her necessity to make ends meet and sometimes out of the sadnesses that reigned in her heart as Heine made his little songs out of his great griefs. I can imagine her receiving confidences from almost any of her acquaintances; they would be able to tell her *everything*, and her response would be as sympathetic and helpful as it could possibly be; but I cannot imagine her unburdening herself to anyone. She was an exceedingly reserved woman, and I should not be surprised to learn that she had never had a really intimate friend—such a friend as you grapple to your soul with hooks of steel and can lay your heart bare to. To the end

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of her days she kept her sorrows to herself except for the few utterances that she permitted herself in the fragments of her *Autobiography*.

6

I had only two or three meetings of any note with Mrs. Oliphant after my cousin's wedding, and one of these lingers very pleasantly in my memory. It took place in Paris in the early 'nineties. I was staying in a *pension* there at the time and Mrs. Oliphant, who was paying a visit to the city with one of my cousins and a daughter of Principal Tulloch of St. Andrews, invited me to dine with her at the hotel where she was staying. I noticed at dinner that she spoke French readily and fluently, entering into friendly conversation with the waiter and understanding all that he said in reply to her. She did not, it is true, speak the language as a Frenchwoman would have done; one might perhaps say that she spoke it internationally, and one might add that while she looked thoroughly English—or should I rather say Scotch?—she also looked international. I was again conscious on this occasion of the underlying friendliness in her attitude towards me. I had not expected to do anything but dine quietly with her, and when it was proposed after dinner that my cousin and Fanny Tulloch and I should go to what is now called a show, I felt a slight embarrassment at the thought that the dress I was wearing was not suitable for the stalls of a theatre where Yvette Guilbert was playing. I hinted as much to Mrs. Oliphant, who immediately said, "D. (my cousin) will lend you a blouse and anything else that you think necessary." The blouse was accordingly produced and

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donned in my cousin's room, and when I returned to show myself, no longer to my dinner-hostess but to the industrious novelist who was just preparing to settle in to her customary task-work, the glance she gave me was so friendly that I had the sensation of warming my hands—or was it my heart?—at a fire. Yes, that woman had a potent magnetism; I think she must have been able to draw close to her anyone for whom she had even a passing feeling of friendliness. I have kept the remembrance of this evening clear in my mind and could write a whole chapter of the incidents that all circled round her and took their life from her. The three of us went off to Yvette Guilbert (and I am afraid that whatever Fanny Tulloch understood of the performance shocked her to the depths—all this happened, you must remember, in Victoria's days) while Mrs. Oliphant, I am sure, plied her pen busily for the four solid hours that she regularly devoted after dinner to her writing. *She*, I think, would not have been "shocked" by Yvette Guilbert or anything else. She was very strict *in* her views, if I may put it so, very conventional, but outside of these views, knowing life as she did, she accepted, I fancy, pretty well everything.

My next meeting with her occurred some time after this, when I had returned to London. The woman with whom I had struck up so warm a friendship at my cousin's wedding commissioned me to take to Mrs. Oliphant some papers that she did not wish to entrust to the post, and I went with them to Windsor Crescent. I recall Mrs. Oliphant on that occasion as old and sad; she might have been a hundred, I thought, as I talked to her. She had by this time had more than enough to make her sad. She had recently lost her firstborn son, Cyril, who had

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grown up to be a singularly handsome young man, very attractive in some ways, but in his earlier years something of a scapegrace; and now the only child left her was her youngest, Cecco, a quiet, studious fellow, ploddingly diligent and thoroughly decorous but constantly ailing and destined to die very soon. It seemed to me on that afternoon that the veil of death was all around the place where we were gathered together. My hostess was very kind and showed a genuine and personal interest in me. Her friend, on whose behalf I had come, was one of those women who, gifted with a quite exceptional power of fascination, find it impossible to keep peacefully within the limits of convention sanctioned by this world. All through her life she jumped over hurdles in search of "freedom"; and that was a proceeding even less likely to be condoned in Victorian times than now. I have a vision of Mrs. Oliphant sitting in her chair and handling the papers I had brought her as they lay in her lap. She did not want to say anything against this friend but I was conscious that she had fears on my account because of my intimacy with her. She beat about the bush in her references to that subject, begging me rather than advising me not to depart in any way from the ideas which she seemed to take for granted that I held. In the impetuous assurances of youth I felt confident that everything was right and that I myself was a Goliath capable of facing and overcoming all difficulties, and she struck me as quite unnecessarily nervous. But that was just because she knew more of the ways of the world than one would have credited her with knowing, while I knew nothing about them then, nothing at all. I have always remembered that afternoon at Windsor in late October, a sad afternoon with no autumnal radiance in it. We sat

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there in the gloaming and I saw Mrs. Oliphant in a new light. Her brightness in talk, her ready response to the moods of those who surrounded her, her quickness in adapting herself to the slightest change of key in the conversation had all dropped away from her, and what was left was something profoundly melancholy and plaintive, something that felt itself weak in a terribly strong world and, though it did its best to put up a good show, was bruised and battered, down below, and full of fears. She would cheer up later on, no doubt; there was a Micawber-like streak in the Oliphant blood, but on the one other occasion, some years later, when I came into contact with her again, I was to see a permanently saddened woman, one who had received a mortal wound and was face to face with death. On that last meeting she was, it seemed to me then and seems to me still, unlike any other human being that I have ever come across. She was *all* feeling, nothing but feeling; and the feeling was a mixture of desolate resignation and despair. There was something magnificent in it but it was dreadful; she might have been a character in one of Shakespeare's tragedies. I suppose Shakespeare must have known what it was to feel like that, or how could he have written about it?

7

My last meeting with Mrs. Oliphant took place at St. Andrews a few months before her death. She was living there at the time and I went, at her invitation, to spend a week-end with her. I myself was in anything but a holiday mood at the time, for my father had died not long before and he had been to me not only a father to whom

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I was deeply attached but a close friend and counsellor. This had been my first round with Death and I had been knocked out by it and had no wish to go visiting anywhere; but my mother, thinking that a change would be good for me, had pushed me into the stream, so to speak, and the current carried me to St. Andrews.

I remember that week-end very distinctly. We were well on in the month of October; out of doors it was gusty and dark, with trees tossing wildly in occasional sheets of rain, and indoors it was not so very different except that we were more reserved than Nature and didn't say out loud all that we thought. Mrs. Oliphant looked now an old, old woman, old and shrunken, but she was perfectly composed. I don't know that she even looked ill, and if you felt that she had now nothing left to hope for in this life, you also felt that on the top of her despair, if I may put it so, she was doing her best to live as usual and that she didn't want to talk about herself. *She* had fought many rounds with death. Her son Cecco (his full and proper name was Francis Romano Oliphant, but he was known all his life by this Italian abbreviation of Francesco) had died three or four years before this, and that had given her the last knock-out blow; everything she had felt worth having had been taken away from her and she was alone in the world. Cecco had, as I have said, never been robust; even in his youth he had shown signs of the disease that had carried away his father. Everything possible had been done to check this budding tuberculosis. Year after year Mrs. Oliphant had taken a house in Switzerland or the Riviera—Interlaken, Monte Carlo, Cannes, Nice—and the malady had apparently been kept at bay, so that Cecco had been able to retain the post of Queen's Librarian pro-

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vided for him by the kindness of Victoria, a great reader of Mrs. Oliphant books, who was always ready to grant him leave of absence on the score of health. But there had been no cure; he had fought his last fight with the enemy and been defeated; and from that blow I do not think that Mrs. Oliphant ever recovered, even temporarily.

Her mood during this visit of mine was essentially like that of the preacher who declared that "All is vanity". But she put a good face on it, as I have indicated, and if, let us say, Mr. Andrew Lang had dropped in to see her, she would have shown herself, superficially and for the time being, much the same witty, responsive hostess as of old. She was still, too, I imagine, as busy as ever, indeed she had to be, for she had no financial reserves to draw upon. When she died shortly after, she had little to leave behind her in the shape of material goods. She had systematically lived up to whatever income she had been making. One might almost say that her long life had held no idle days from start to finish. I think she quickly saw that I was, like herself, deeply depressed and she did her best to distract me and prevent me from dwelling on my sorrow; she tried to entertain me and interest me by telling me of people and places she had seen and by describing little incidents that had made an impression on her. I thought this very kind of her, and before we were done we really did, I believe, succeed in distracting each other to some extent. I saw in her then, what my mother, who knew this cousin of hers so intimately in certain aspects, had never seen—a genial Mrs. Oliphant, who could be very human, though always with a sharp and piquant edge to her humanity. It is a queer and somewhat dismaying thought that, however well we know anybody, we can never, here and

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now, know him or her through and through. We only know what gets into the display window, yes, even in the case of our nearest and dearest.

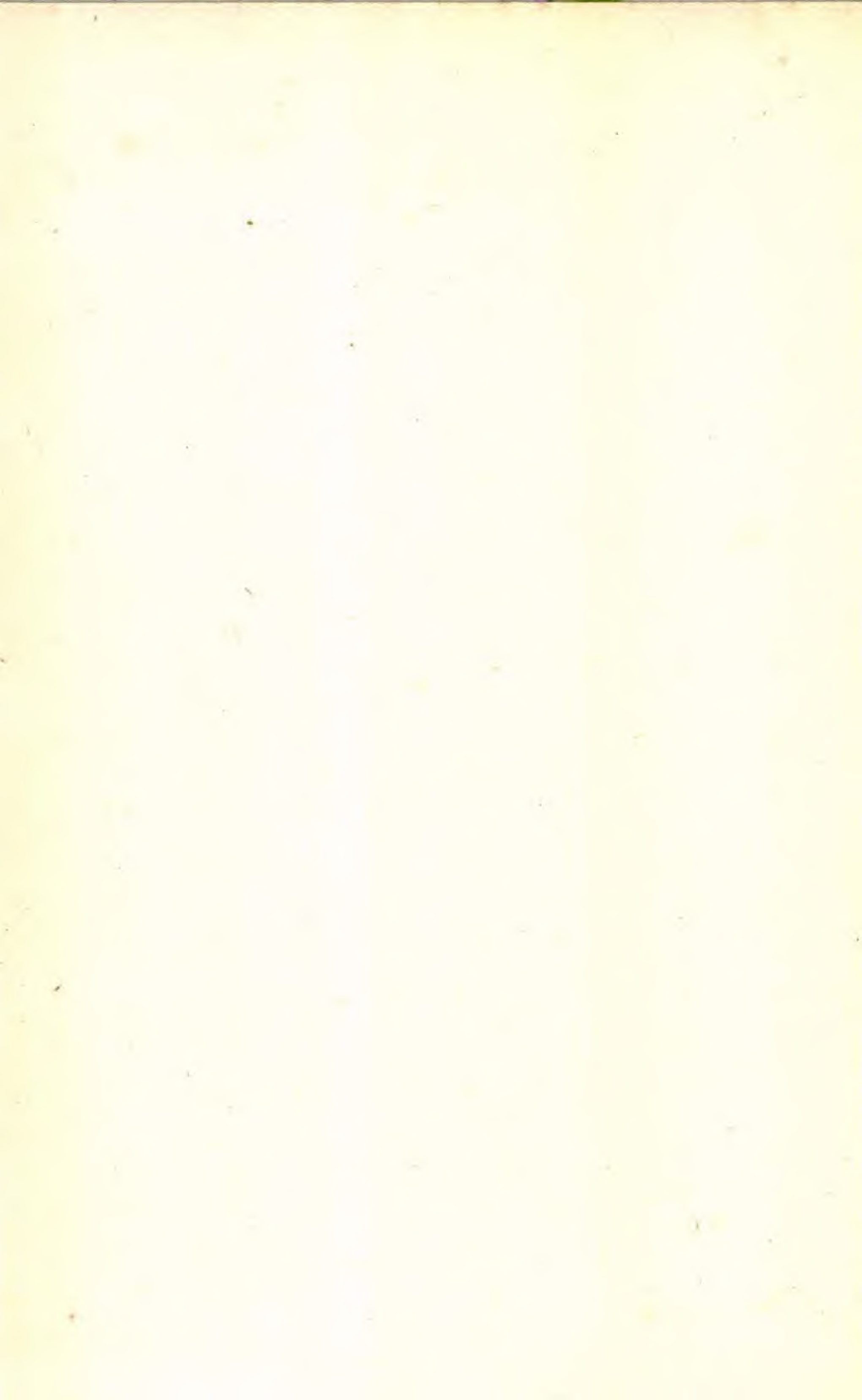
It was in the course of this visit that I recognized what an excellent *raconteuse* my hostess was. She was neither wordy nor prosy, she talked in short sentences and she used small words. I remember her telling me about her camping in the desert on a trip she had taken to the Holy Land and how, as she spoke, I seemed to see through her eyes the glory of the rising sun upon the desert sands. I liked too the way in which she told me of my cousin's having met at Jericho, of all places, with the man who was to be her husband. "If you want a wedding, go to Jericho," she said to me. She had a way with the spoken word that I do not think she ever reached with the written, and I felt that she would have been very much at home in one of the French salons of the eighteenth century; she would have taken her place there easily and naturally.

It was in one of these talks that she gave me her view of my grandmother, as I have recorded it here. It does not quite square with the somewhat casual way in which she speaks of this old lady in her *Autobiography*, and this suggests that Mrs. Oliphant, the *raconteuse*, was not above stretching a point in order to gratify her audience. If so, I am none the less grateful to her for the kindness she showed me, for kind she unquestionably was, though even in her kindness one was always conscious of an astringent flavour. I recall the way she looked at me when, just as we were about to part, she gave me a direct piece of advice, with an evident desire to be of help to me. Detaching herself from the piece of writing on which she had been engaged, she turned to me and

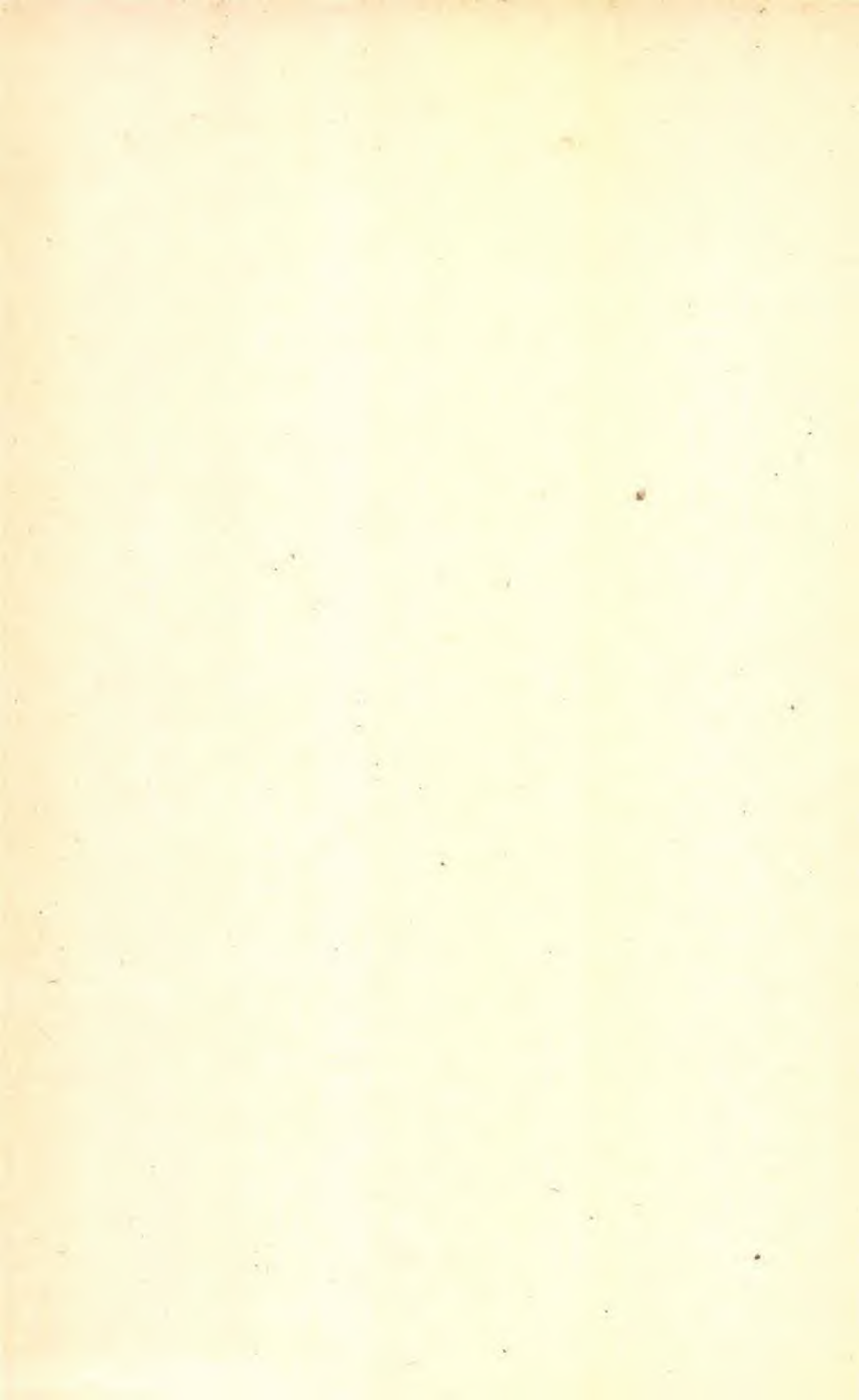
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took my hand in both of hers. "My dear," she said (and her voice was not only didactic but earnest; she meant what she was saying), "marry the first man who asks you and get yourself a baby as soon as you can. For that is the only thing that matters in this world." She held my hand a moment, looking at me very kindly with her most perceptive eyes. Yes, she meant it; that precept and maxim gave the gist of all that she had learned from what we may call her copious view of life; it comprised her whole woman's philosophy.

I took my leave of her and of St. Andrews on a gusty morning and I never saw her again. As I have said, she died—I had almost written "she was released"—a few months later. I have never met anyone at all like her since.



A Triple View of
W. B. Yeats



3. *A Triple View of W. B. Yeats*

I

When I was a girl of fifteen or sixteen I used to watch from a window of our suburban house at Chiswick a young man wandering in the as yet unbuilt-on fields that surrounded us. He was tall, lean and lanky; he wore no hat, and on a breezy day his long black hair, of which one lock constantly fell on his forehead to be wiped away again by an impatient hand, was swept here and there by the wind. His eyes, as I could see even at the distance from which I regarded him, were black, coal-black. Yes, they were black, but when he stood still, as he sometimes did, waving his arms and turning his face to the sky, they were blue, cerulean blue, and clear as limpid water. If he saw me at all, he made no sign of doing so. And I doubt if he *did* see anything outside himself in those field-wanderings of his. He seemed to be saying something to himself, for his lips moved and now and then he would emphasize phrases by movements of his hands. He often looked excited and sometimes rapt; to the half-grown creature that I then was, he looked decidedly peculiar, and I wondered what all the fuss was about. That young man was W. B. Yeats, the poet—Willie Yeats, as everyone then called him. He couldn't sell his poems at that time and he couldn't

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often get anyone to listen to him when he said them out loud. Almost everyone found fault with him because he absolutely refused to consider any calling (of a pecuniary nature) but that of a poet, and it was generally accepted as a plain fact that he shouldn't let his two sisters earn all the money by which the House of Yeats was kept going. His father, John B. Yeats, the painter, found it difficult to sell his pictures in those days and the family was therefore mainly dependent on the sisters, one of whom was in the kindergarten business, while the other was an embroideress in William Morris's workshops. "It is disgraceful", nearly everyone said, "that that young man doesn't get out and *do* something instead of letting his sisters slave for him. Couldn't he be a bank clerk or sweep a crossing, for that matter,"—there were "crossing-sweepers" in those far-off times—"and write poems in the evenings?"

The one person known to me who took Willie Yeats's side in any such discussion was the person whose opinion I valued more than any other in the world—my father, who, being a writer himself, had natural sympathies with another. *He* said: "That young man *has* to write verse. That is the way he is made. He wouldn't make a bank clerk and he couldn't sweep a crossing. He was born to be a poet and a poet he is—in the making now. That wild creature", I remember his saying to me on one occasion, "whom you see wandering in the fields will live to be one of the first poets of his time. I see you don't believe me but what I say will come true."

Is it to be wondered at, after this, that young Yeats should find the entry to our house and should now and then ring rather nervously at the bell, and, when the door was opened, ask with hesitation: "May I go up—

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stairs?" "Upstairs" was my father's study, and there the poet would go, seat himself in the old, comfortable, heavily cushioned wicker chair that faced my father's leather seat at the other side of the fireplace, and produce his "last". My father would listen to it and the space dividing the two would be full of timid hope on the one side and sympathetic understanding on the other, with the glowing fire between. After an hour or so the young poet would steal down the stairs, open the front door for himself, slip through the aperture and, I take it, go home satisfied, as if he had had a good meal when he was hungry, hungry. I fancy that my father was almost the only auditor from whom Willie Yeats received encouragement in those distant days. Anyhow, when the poet and I met some forty years later and in a land separated from England by an ocean, what pleased me most and went most directly to my heart as I spoke with him was what he said to me about my father, who by that time slept with *his* fathers and was long past the trials of this world. A little bit of well-turned praise—what it can do for us! I shall repeat the exact words spoken by Yeats when I reach the part of my story dealing with my third meeting with him.

In the Chiswick of those early days the house occupied by the poet's family was just round the corner from us. It was a house full of what I may perhaps call wind-blown talent. Mrs. Yeats, the mother, had been beautiful and still was so. Her mind, poor lady, had gone a little astray (as if life had been too much for her) but her beauty remained, as the beauty of a rose remains when its petals begin to fall. Yeats *père* I never really got to know; I saw him and listened to him, of course, but though he was as fluent a talker as it has ever been my

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fortune to meet, what he said—remember I was only a raw girl then—was beyond me and I didn't really attend to it. The stream of his talk poured on, and I sat on the bank and liked its flow, but what it was all about I don't and never did know. It was really addressed to an intelligent smile, with nothing behind it so far as concerned the import of what he was saying, but whether he realized this or not I do not know. An intelligent smile and an attitude betokening interest on the part of almost any girl or woman of not too repellent an appearance will generally induce a man to go on indefinitely confiding bits of his mind to her, and what is more, he will enjoy doing so.

Jack Yeats, the younger son, I do not remember ever seeing; he may have been out playing or at school on the two or three occasions when I visited the house. One of the sisters, Lollie, I sometimes came across at a friend's house, and with the other sister, Lily, the embroideress, I had several meetings at the house of another friend who also worked in the embroidery department of Morris's Workshops. Beautiful embroideresses they both were, and I used to listen to them with fascinated astonishment when they were comparing notes about their craft and to marvel at the heights and depths that embroidery could apparently reach. As for Willie Yeats himself, I cannot remember exchanging a word with him at this time, though we were, of course, well aware of one another's existence; it was not until a year or two later, when I had returned to Chiswick after a year's study of music in Berlin, that my little connection with him, if I may give it that name, began.

On coming home from Berlin I was myself a somewhat changed girl and I found a distinctly changed

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Willie Yeats. He had emerged from what the Scots would call the "halfing" phase and was now beginning to turn into the W. B. Yeats who could place at least some of his wares with an assurance that they would be warmly appreciated by a small but select circle of readers. The mystic streak that so strongly characterized him all the rest of his life, if it had not exactly developed in my absence, had certainly become more obvious. Stories were told of his eccentricities, such as that of a friend who, returning from a party late at night and taking a short cut through a shabby little side-street, found Yeats seated on the doorstep of one of its houses. "What in God's name are you doing here, Willie?" he exclaimed in astonishment, and Yeats, speaking in a deep spectral tone, replied: "I am waiting for my astral body." Whether this story is apocryphal or not I cannot say but it was widely circulated at the time and no one who knew Yeats would deny that such an incident *might* have occurred. One could believe anything of Yeats, and he himself told me of an episode which, if it puts a certain strain on one's credulity, was assuredly narrated to me in all good faith. It related to Madame Blavatsky who, at the time I am speaking of, was a good deal in the public eye. Many a tale of the queer things that happened in her house went the rounds. Yeats was naturally interested in her and he was taken to see her by a friend. She received him very graciously and after some talk said to him—I tell the story exactly as I remember Yeats telling it to me—"I should like to give you a present. Go down into the hall and put your hand into the right-hand pocket of your greatcoat. And then come back to me."

Yeats did exactly as he had been told. He knew quite

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well that though there was a handkerchief in one pocket of his greatcoat, there was nothing at all in the right-hand pocket, but he followed his instructions. He had recently learned to smoke and as he made his way downstairs to the entrance-hall, the thought passed through his mind: "How nice it would be to find a cigar-case in my pocket!" He did not know how he came by this thought, for he had never entertained the idea of getting a cigar-case for himself. He reached the hall, put his hand into the right-hand pocket of his greatcoat, felt that there was something there, and pulled out a leather cigar-case. He made his way back to Madame Blavatsky, who smiled and said to him: "I think we shall be friends."

There is no explanation of this little incident. I am sure that Yeats was telling me precisely what happened; I always found that he made his statements without exaggeration or distortion. Did Madame Blavatsky deliberately put into his head the thought of a cigar-case as a desirable possession? The actual case (which at the end of the story he was telling me he pulled out of his coat pocket to show me) she must have had planted in his greatcoat pocket downstairs while she was holding him in conversation in the drawing-room. Are there people who can plant ideas, at will, in other people's minds, and was Madame Blavatsky one of them? I never saw her, but I have always thought that she must have been a remarkable woman even if she *was* something of a cheat.

For some reason best known to himself Yeats had a strong conviction that I possessed a mystic streak of my own, and I suppose he was addressing this streak when he told me his story. At any rate he got the idea into his head that I might be useful to him in his psychic ex-

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plorations, and one evening, when an opportunity of putting me to a first test presented itself, he availed himself of it. The scene of action was the drawing-room in the house of our neighbour John Todhunter, an Irish poet and scholar of some note in his day, though I suppose nobody reads him now. It was on one of the Todhunters' "At Home" evenings, and perhaps, by way of preliminary, I should explain that in the London of the 'nineties, so much more leisurely than that of to-day, there were a good many households, especially, I think, those in which the income-earner was a writer or an artist, where evening "At Homes" were a regular institution. The heads of such households would be "at home" on certain specified evenings—say the second and fourth Wednesday in the month—from 8 p.m. onwards, usually till about 11 p.m. The fact was known, and any friend of the household was made welcome; two people might come or twenty. At about nine o'clock a tray was brought in, rather more amply supplied with refreshment than the "afternoon tea" tray would have been; at some houses there were bottles of beer or glasses of whisky for those who preferred these drinks. The whole affair was informal, and no one "dressed". I remember Yeats showing me, at one of these reunions, Blake's illustrations to the Book of Job in a big volume that lay open before us on a small table and talking to me about them. Indeed, it was on this very evening, if I am not mistaken, that my little and rather unsatisfactory "connection", as I have called it, with him came into being.

I noticed, while he was speaking of the illustrations, that he was not looking at them so much as at me, and I imagine that I responded to my perception of the fact

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with a blush, which in Victorian times was a sort of synonym for the Georgian lipstick that every woman wears to-day. He began to explain. Pulling out of his waistcoat pocket a handful of small pieces of cardboard cut into squares, oblongs, triangles, pentagons, etc., and adorned with mystic symbols in various shades of colour, he looked round at a long window-seat just behind us (we were sitting in an alcove of the drawing-room) and asked me if I would mind lying down on it and closing my eyes, so that he might place upon them some of those pasteboard figures. This, he said, was an experiment that he had long wished to try, for he thought that I might help him to something that he wished to know. I was somewhat taken aback and said that I must first ask our hostess if she would have any objection to my doing this; Yeats rather hesitatingly acquiesced, and I made my way to Mrs. Todhunter and put the matter before her, ardently hoping that she would disembarass me by suggesting that another time would be more suitable for the experiment. I was exceedingly fond of Mrs. Todhunter; she was as motherly a woman as I have ever met and she was also large-minded and willing to let others go their own way. What she said now was: "Certainly, dear, if you wish to. See that the windows are closed so that you are in no draught. Lie down if young Yeats wants it. No one will notice you, and when the tea-tray comes in, you can join us again."

The poet and I accordingly retired to the window of the small alcove and I lay down at full length on the seat. He then dealt out the pasteboards he was holding in his hand, selected two of them, which he placed, one on each of my closed lids, and then, after adjuring me to lie quite still, to think about nothing, and to tell him

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when he came back what I had seen, he turned and left me.

As I lay there, the burning question in my mind was: "*What* was I supposed to see?" If there has been one thing in this life that I have always wanted to do more than another, it has been to comply with the wishes of anyone who asks me to do something; it is a foible that has often brought me into trouble. Thus on this occasion the desire to please young Yeats was *there*, in me, and I couldn't put it away. "If only", I thought to myself, "I had any idea of what he wanted me to see, I am sure I would see it in a minute." I was so anxious to play my part in the experiment to his satisfaction that there was no room left for anything else to enter into me, if I may put it so. I tried with all my might to see something, and the more I tried, the less chance, naturally, I had of seeing anything at all; a whirling blackness might, I think, suggest the only impression made on me while those two pieces of pasteboard lay on my eyes.

Yeats came back and the only thing I had to say to him was: "I saw nothing." I could see that he was disappointed, but he behaved very well. "You *ought* to be able to see something with those eyes," he remarked. No one had ever remarked upon my eyes before, and I take it that I blushed again. "Well, better luck next time," was his next observation, or words to that effect. Was all this to be gone through again? thought I, and I determined that I would never attend another of dear Mrs. Todhunter's "evenings". But when the next evening came round, there I was and again I lay on the window-seat and again saw nothing and felt acutely that I had failed where I ought to have succeeded. I have a good deal of Highland blood in me from my mother's people,

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and experiences in my later life have made me realize that Yeats had some justification for thinking he might have found a helpful medium in me. Indeed, before we were done with these experiments I did reach a stage when I could "see" dark-blue heavens studded with silver constellations and could recognize Orion shining in the forefront of my vision; and even this little advance pleased poor Yeats and he welcomed all that I had to say on the subject, taking a special interest in what related to Orion. If only the way had been left clear for us to continue our experiments—he as trainer, I as medium—I feel sure that we should have "got somewhere", as the saying is, but the sudden and quite unexpected death of my father, which took place shortly after the time I have been speaking of, not only gave my whole personal world a shock, but put an end to those meetings of ours. Some sixteen or seventeen years elapsed before our next meeting—if that is a legitimate word to use for what passes between two people, of whom the one only sits in a lecture-hall, looking at and listening to the other who speaks from the platform. Let me at any rate make use of it here and see if I can set down my recollections of that occasion.

2

At the time of this second meeting I was living in the city of Montreal, and from an announcement in one of the local newspapers I learned one day that the Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, was to give a lecture there on a certain date. As soon as I saw this announcement I determined that I would not only go to hear him but that I would speak to him when the lecture was over. I thought it

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would be entertaining to recall those *séances*, if I may call them so, that we had held in Mrs. Todhunter's drawing-room. I am not often disposed to call up the past for review, but this particular past seemed to me to be an innocent enough one, and to hold no bitterness for anyone. In this mood I went to the Art Gallery lecture-hall, took the seat which I had booked with a careful eye to its giving me a good view of the lecturer, and waited for him to appear. But no sooner had he stepped on to the platform than I had decided that I would leave the second part of my little programme alone. I made this decision the moment I set eyes on him—before he had opened his lips. I couldn't exactly say why my mind had changed so suddenly, but changed it had. I would have recognized the poet anywhere. His was always an arresting personality; once encountered, it made its mark on you and you could not obliterate it from your memory. Yes, "he" was there, and he was taking up nearly all the "there" in the lecture-hall. Even in his youth it had been characteristic of him to produce that effect; it would have been impossible for anyone to enter Mrs. Todhunter's drawing-room when he was bending over and expounding Blake's illustrations to poor Job's ordeals without noticing and being struck by that willowy figure. But the figure that I now watched from my seat in the hall was not the old "Willie", the young man who wandered about the fields gesticulating and repeating to himself fragments of his poems. Or rather, he was that young man still, but now it was not Willie Yeats but William Butler Yeats who confronted me from the platform. William Butler Yeats kept, I do not doubt, his youthful attitude to the world somewhere or other within himself, but what we onlookers saw that

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night was a man in middle life, a man calm, self-possessed, with an ample dignity of his own, and one whose tailor was clearly of the highest rank in his profession. No, this was hardly a personage to whom one could go up and light-heartedly recall old times. Yeats had a remarkable abundance of gifts, but I would say there was one gift which he did not possess—a sense of humour. This was, of course, a side of him to which George Moore was keenly alive, and very funny Moore can be when, as so often happens in his “Hail and Farewell”, he presents Yeats to us at a moment when he said or did this or that, quite unconscious of the lurking comicality of the situation. Yeats *was* funny, assuredly; he could even make the astral body seem funny by waiting for it, and I should think few people have managed to do that; but this humour was unintentional and so perhaps one could hardly say that he “possessed” it. He had the other qualities that sometimes seem to demand the absence of humour in anyone in whom they are to flourish conspicuously.

As I sat there watching him that night, I thought that I had never seen anyone quite like him, and I would guess that most of his other listeners felt as I did. His eyes often spoke for him when his tongue left something unsaid. I have mentioned the curious quality they had of being or seeming to be either black or blue or occasionally, if such a statement is credible, both colours simultaneously. On this evening, when he raised them from the manuscript from which he was reading, they were black and refulgent. I think that the best of what he had to give his audience didn't come to it by word of mouth. At any rate I couldn't tell you one word of his lecture. I have even forgotten its subject and its title, and yet I

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have a clear picture of *him* as he appeared to me while he was delivering it. I have listened to a good many lectures in my time and I have come to the conclusion that lecturers may be divided into two entirely distinct classes; whether they are good, bad or indifferent lecturers doesn't, of course, affect the classification. A lecturer who belongs to the first class gives you something definite and explicit that you can take away with you. He gives you an idea or, it may be, an actual sentence or two from which you can draw profit or comfort at the time and which perhaps you can repeat to yourself years later. Lecturers of the second class do not appeal primarily to the intellectual part of you, but they leave imprinted on some other part of you what I can only call an image of themselves or, if not exactly of themselves, of the kind of thoughts and beliefs they represent. The first lecturer leaves with you a bit of his mind—as much of it as you are able to receive—while the second leaves a sort of essence of what his thoughts, his feelings, his experience of life have made him, and you go away from his lecture enriched with an impression that may keep on working within you for a long time to come. Thus I am unable to repeat anything that Yeats said that night, but all the time his lecture was going on I recognized that I was in the presence of a very remarkable person. He made no effort to impress his audience. It did not seem to me that he read particularly well, nor did his sentences, admirably and characteristically phrased as they were, seem striking or stimulating while he uttered them. He had not the quality of the born lecturer who, unconsciously, I fancy, makes himself one of his own audience. He stood apart, quite by himself, up there on the platform, and we sat in our seats and looked up a little and listened.

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Some people might say that, when the lecture was over, I had got nothing out of it; others might think that I was taking away from it the thing that mattered most. I myself incline to the latter view. I have had the same sort of impression occasionally when I have been fortunate enough to hear some of T. S. Eliot's poems read aloud to me; at the end of listening to them I feel that I have "got" something, though I haven't the slightest idea what it is. I only know that it is there and that it won't go away and I receive it gratefully as a present from Mr. Eliot. That is the feeling I had and have about this lecture of Yeats which I am describing in such an erratic fashion. I take it that what is handed out to us by the species of artist to which Yeats and Eliot belong can never really be put into intelligible words, and I shall make no such attempt here. I will only say that when I walked home in the rain that night I readjusted my ideas about the old Willie Yeats at whom, I suspect, I would merely have smiled if my father had not had such a high opinion of him and his work. I realized now, after listening to him, that he *had* something to say and that, though he hadn't seemed to me to make it very clear in his lecture, he would get it said in his own way and would leave it behind him when he departed this life. And this, if I am not mistaken, is what he has actually done. He *has* left something behind him, and if I am not intelligent or expert enough to say what that something is, I can at least feel it, and that is the first step towards understanding it. Perhaps he never did succeed in making perfectly clear what he wanted to say.

When I pass on to my next meeting with him, almost a score of years later, I may perhaps be able to make it more comprehensible why it was that, on seeing him at

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this lecture, I should have instantly decided *not* to go behind the scenes and talk to him of old times. In this middle period of his life he was apt, I think, to impress one as not exactly formidable perhaps, but as somewhat unapproachable. One felt that he kept aloof and did not ask for companionship. He seemed to me on this occasion to be divided into two portions—the artist (who represented a good three-quarters of the whole) and something that one might call the man of the world. Possibly it was the excellence of his London tailor's workmanship that gave one the latter impression, just as the careless lock of hair which tumbled over his forehead in the old fashion of his youth and which he tossed back impatiently from time to time identified him with the man who wrote the verse. He was aloof and a little contemptuous of us; that at any rate was the effect he produced on one of his audience. We didn't really understand what he was driving at and he didn't think that we *would* understand. We had paid for our tickets and he, I presume, got paid by his agent, and we all went home and to bed, one of us wondering how the gawky young man whom she had known in the early 'nineties had ever developed into *this*. I think that for many people the middle period of life is the most difficult; anyhow few of us show to advantage at that stage of our journey. There was always something noble in Yeats, but I would say that at this time of his life, though naturally it was *there*, it might not be much in evidence, unless to very perceptive eyes. I, too, was then in mid-life and hadn't a great deal of sense; I thought I knew a lot but actually I knew very little. When I met Yeats again life had taken both of us in hand and we "got on" as we had never managed to do in our youth; we were

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friends. That is a bold thing for me to say but I hope and think that if W. B. were here he would endorse it.

3

The next opportunity given me of coming into touch with Yeats was also in Montreal and also at a lecture. On this occasion he was speaking not from a platform but from a pulpit; the minister of the church in question was of the Unitarian denomination, and regular Sunday evening lectures on secular subjects were given in his church. Sometimes the lecturer spoke from the chancel and sometimes from the pulpit; he could make his own choice. William Butler Yeats chose the pulpit, and a fine, massive figure he made as he stood in it.

I had gone early, and had got a good seat, and I watched the audience flowing in until they filled the church to overflowing. Some of them had no doubt read and admired the lecturer's poems and essays; more of them had seen his nationalistic play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, which had been given in Montreal by the Irish players, and, if I am not mistaken, had also been presented by the company brought out by Miss Horniman. Lady Gregory, too, with whose playlets this audience was familiar, had been a splendid ambassador for the poet. She had the woman's kack of pouring her heart out when she was addressing an audience on some subject that came from the depths of her, and as I had the privilege once of being a fellow-guest with her in a friend's house, I know that in private no less than in public *her* subject was W. B. Yeats. Any moment was suitable for broaching it; some remembrance of the poet, something he had said or thought or felt, would come

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out of her as flowers came out of the earth—at Nature's bidding. She was a charming old lady, both to look at and to listen to and, as I have said, a good ambassador, none better. I should imagine that nearly all of us in that church knew something about our lecturer; and that is often more than can be said in the case of lecturers who have had no Lady Gregorys to herald their approach.

When Yeats came into the pulpit I got a start, for at a first glance I should not have recognized him, though I should not have been at a loss for a moment, once he had opened his mouth. He had a fine, resonant voice. There was, it is true, lacking in it some quality possessed by those speakers who can stir something in our emotional depths and make us eager to follow the bidding that their words seem to convey to us. I am unable to express exactly what I mean but perhaps I might suggest it by saying that Yeats's voice lacked the power to *move* one. We listened to him and, if I may judge others by myself, we thought: "That is well said, excellently expressed and it is true." But the other thing, the thing that moves you, as you walk home after the lecture, to make this or that resolution for yourself, was not there. The speakers who affect you like that—Salvemini was one of them—do not only move you; they change you too. You feel about what they say: "That is *right* and I shall try to keep walking up the road that it points to."

Such a feeling as that Yeats did not inspire. But he was a good speaker with a fine voice and a happy accent (of all the different brands of English that in South Ireland is surely the prettiest) and he spoke with conviction. You can't have everything in this world; I don't suppose Shakespeare himself had everything, and as for Yeats, though he interested you, and gratified you, and

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aroused your admiration for, I think I may say, pretty well everything about him, you didn't give *yourself* in response to what he said to you.

None the less, when the lecture was over, I was eager and anxious to speak to him. On this occasion I wouldn't for anything have gone away without having a word with him. I was to see him in any case, for the secretary of the society for which he was speaking had invited me, as one of a small party, to come up to his flat for a cup of coffee after the lecture was over. I made my way through the crowd to the vestry where I had been told to go and waited by the door until those who were crowding round the lecturer had departed. I could just see his head through the seething mass of people, and it looked, that distinctive head of his standing out from all the others round about him, not bored but, let me say, determined. It was evident enough that he was not enjoying himself. Possibly no lecturer likes very much the aftermath of his lecture but some pretend that they do. Yeats made no pretence; the expression on his face was: "I have to do it and I will", and he did. In the end the audience blew out through the doorway like a blast of wind that comes and then goes, no man knows whence or whither. The place was quiet. The secretary took me up to Yeats and introduced me and I suppose that I smiled and waited. Nothing, I think, is so difficult as to renew a relation—any kind of relation—that has been broken off a long time ago. And the last time that Yeats and I had actually met must have been somewhere between thirty-five and forty years ago. In that length of time things change.

However, when I found myself and Yeats walking quite close together in the keen late-autumn air,

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they somehow didn't seem to have changed—very much!

“Is there a step here?” he had asked me when we were making our exit from the church, and then, explanatorily, he added: “I don't see much now.” I had noticed that on the pulpit-desk, where the sermon lies on Sunday, there had been a large piece of cardboard which he seemed to consult from time to time, not through spectacles, as might have been natural at his age, but with what we are accustomed to call “his own eyes”. And once, when this cardboard slab tilted as he was replacing it on the desk, I could see that there were on it disjointed lines of what looked like illumination rather than writing, some of them with two or three, some with a dozen words on them, and that here and there, going down the card, there was an enormous, brightly coloured initial letter. I had wondered why during his lecture he kept referring to such a contraption; now I grasped that it had been designed as an assistance to an almost blind man. “Is there a step there?” he had asked me, “I don't see very well now.” I slipped my hand through his arm and brought him down the step. “We're on the side-walk now,” I said, using the Canadian word (and indeed there are no “pavements”, in the literal sense of the word, in Canadian cities). “We have to cross the road,” I added. “It's not far where we're going—just over there,” and I suppose I pointed generally in a slanting direction, “but it's rather a bad road to cross, it's so broad. May I keep your arm?” I asked him a little tentatively.

He did not answer but pressed my hand a little more firmly to his side, and so we went across broad Sherbrooke Street together and landed safely on the other side.

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A moment or so later he broke right into the silence between us by saying: "I have never met anyone so fascinating as your father. Yes," he repeated, "he was a fascinating man. He had something——" He paused and then said again: "I have never met anyone like him since."

At these words, drawn from the old poet now almost half a century after the time when a seed of hope had first been dropped into his young heart by my father, I felt that I could follow him to Jericho or wherever else he might have wanted to go. That seed now seemed to me to have grown into a tree, and I thought to myself: "I could die for you!" And after this, as I remember, no word passed between us until we had toiled up the three steep storeys of staircase that led us to the old-fashioned flat we wanted to reach. Our host unlatched the door for us, turned on the light and, taking us into his sitting-room, seated the poet in the best arm-chair he had. Two or three people, all men, if my memory serves me, had come in with us—probably officials of the society responsible for the lecture—and I stood there in some little perplexity, not wishing to overreach what Yeats might want me to do. He had taken off his overcoat and seated himself near the table on which the refreshment would be placed when it came, and now he motioned me to a chair beside him. "Won't you sit there?" he said in his charming, resonant Irish voice, "and let us have a talk?" He hesitated a moment and then said, "about old times."

I took the seat indicated and he began rather tentatively by saying: "Do you remember Lily, my sister?"

"I remember her well," I rejoined. "Who could forget the lovely work she did?"

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He looked pleased. "The work she did then", he said "is nothing to what she turns out now. She is a beautiful embroideress. A real artist."

He paused again and then went on: "I knew that she had sold some full-length figures to a church"—I think he said "in France", but I cannot swear to this—"and lately, when I was abroad and near the place where I knew they were, I went to see them. Do you know", he continued slowly, and his voice became grave, "what she had done?—a series of full-length figures of Saints. I think they were equal and in some ways superior to all the priceless old embroideries that surrounded them. I never thought", he added, looking at me, "that Lily could rise to that. One takes one's family for granted. But——" he stopped short and then in a low voice he said, "those figures were the work of a real artist. They were beautiful!"

It is impossible to convey in words the sound of a voice; hearing it, listening to it, is the only way by which we can *take it in*. W. B. Yeats had at all times a sonorous voice but when he said: "They were beautiful" a sort of religious tone came into it. I thought: "What a worshipper of beauty you truly are!"

As he sat there he looked—"magnificent" is the only word I find fitted to the occasion. Whatever he had been in youth or in mid-life, he was now a handsome, a magnificent old man. His hair, as plentiful as it had ever been, was snow-white. He was dressed as carefully as he had been when I listened to his lecture in the Art Gallery almost a score of years before, but now how differently! Then he had looked a man of the world, well "turned out". What he now wore was not only of a different material but it was worn in a different spirit.

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It had then been broadcloth; now it was home-spun of the finest kind, silver-grey in shade, spun by hand, worked out on the hand-loom, presumably at his sister's place in Ireland. His socks and his tie were blue of a pale indigo shade, and they too, I think, had been made by the work of human hands. His shoes were strong and looked ready to start their wearer up a mountain. He was leaning back in his ample arm-chair and looking thoughtfully in front of him, seeing perhaps with those eyes which are not the eyes that we use to view the outside, ordinary world, some of those things he had just been recording. "If only," I thought as I looked at him, "if only someone were here to make a picture of you—just the way you look to-night!" If Goya had been able to come back out of his grave, bringing with him the mind that he took into it and the skill that he had in putting that mind on to paper or canvas, *what* a psychological study we should have had to ponder over! I suppose everyone has had at some time the desire, a ridiculous and yet profound desire, that the moment—the Faustian moment—might be prolonged, indefinitely prolonged, that it might never end. At this juncture I had such a moment; I wanted "time" so that what was before me might expand, might open and tell me—I don't exactly know what but I think it was something that I felt sure Yeats had learned from life . . . and then the doorbell rang, just as it or something else always does ring when such a moment is impending; one never does get "there". And our host, opening the door, ushered a lady in, guided her further forward in our direction, introduced her to the guest of the evening and placed a chair for her close to mine, fronting that guest. Yeats roused himself. Goya's sketch would never have

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been finished. The three men to the left, whom I had kept from having any conversation with the only person in the room that they wanted to talk to, gave up the ghost of any hope that they might get a word with him before the evening ended; and the lady, a lady in her early thirties, all got up to kill, lipsticked, smiling, excessively anxious to make herself heard and quite confident that what she had to say would be welcome hearing, plunged into an account of herself, her talents, her wish to be an actress, her aspirations as to what she would act—and what she would not act, if she only got the chance! The room was full of her. The doorbell rang again. The little party that was to be gathered together to meet the poet was coming along; the room would soon be filled with them. And what did the poet do under these circumstances? He absented himself. Not corporeally. There he was, just as he had been, or rather I should say he was in the same place. But now, in the great arm-chair which had lately held so magnificent a figure, there was not a man but a snow-capped mountain, leagues, continents away. There was no lolling now. The mountain that had so lately been a man sat up, erect, listening possibly from somewhere in the Himalayas—or *was* he listening? I doubt it. He was there, and he wasn't there; both things at once. The man who had only a moment before so devoutly appreciated his sister's artistry was gone. I suppose the Yeats whom George Moore saw standing by an Irish lake with a knee-long cape falling in folds about him, looked much as Yeats looked now. This, indeed, was the Yeats that Moore was always given to see. I can only say that to me at this moment he looked both ridiculous and sublime. How true it is that there is only a step between the one and

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the other! The full force of the adage came upon me when the man whom I had just been contemplating so admiringly turned into a Himalayan peak before my eyes. The lady went on talking.

I hope I have not been unjust to Yeats in suggesting, as I have probably done, that he appreciated the artist in his sister rather than the other way round. I doubt if what we call human affection had much place in his nature. I would not, of course, imply for a moment that there was anything "inhuman" in him, but I think he might be described as a little "off the human", if I may put it so. What he was really in love with and married to was art, and towards any manifestation of it he would not only be keenly sympathetic but would put himself to endless trouble in order to further it in every way he could. I fancy that his feeling for Synge and his work was not unlike that which he had for Lily, and that it was his appreciation of Synge's talent more than any affection for Synge as a man that inspired the zealous championship by which he so effectually helped that fellow-artist. Most of us give away bits of ourselves to our fellow-creatures in the course of our journey through life, but Yeats seems to me to have been self-contained all the way. Thus he could abstract himself monumentally when occasion called, as it did on the evening that I have been attempting to describe. He sat impassive, and the lady, as I have said, went on talking.

I got up to go. My host hurried up to me and asked me to wait; the coffee and cakes were just appearing. But I felt that I had had my share. Yeats, when I bent down and said good-bye to him, taking his hand as I did so, kept mine for a second in both of his, and I felt my father's ghost pass between us. As I went out at the

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front door I looked back. He had put his snow-cap on again; the mountain was in full view; there was no sign of life or humanity on it. The men who had come across from the lecture with us still sat, a silent band of three. The lady went on talking, and I heard her voice, faintly resounding, as I made my way downstairs.

A Reminiscence of
George Meredith



4. *A Reminiscence of George Meredith*

I remember with great distinctness—though only in spots, so to say—a visit that my parents and I paid to George Meredith when I was a small child. I must have been about eight when the invitation came from Box Hill and I was told that I had been asked to go and “play with” Meredith’s daughter, a child of, I suppose, more or less my own age. My father had often been to Box Hill, for he and Meredith were at this time congenial souls, but this was the first occasion on which my mother was to accompany him. As for me, it was the first “visit” that I had paid in my life, and I have no doubt that I was fairly bubbling over with excitement and expectancy. I was an only child and few exciting things came into my life, so this must have been a great day for me, though I had no idea who or what “Mr. Meredith” was. In those days anybody new was, for me, somebody worth knowing, and a change of any kind was regarded as a treat.

Memory is a queer thing. It records what it feels inclined to record (often the merest trifles with no apparent importance to their credit), and we seem to have little control over it. It is one of those fundamental things that we know next to nothing about and just have to take as it comes. Of this visit I clearly remember two incidents only, and the first of them I did not at the time understand. It was a conversation held at the dinner-

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table, where, presumably because there was no convenient place for me elsewhere, I had a seat. I sat opposite my mother, and could thus catch her monitory signals as to what I should or should not eat. She was beside Mr. Meredith, whom I could see very plainly by the light of the lamp—a hanging-lamp, I think—which cast a sort of halo round his handsome head and vital face. Miss Keary's *Heroes of Asgard* was a favourite book of mine at the time, and I remember thinking that he looked like one of those heroes. Mrs. Meredith, Meredith's second wife, a personable woman of that peculiarly French type that can be both extremely practical and yet extremely well "set up" in appearance, sat at the other end of the table.

The conversation that I recollect—or should I rather call it a soliloquy?—was about a chop. I blush to register such ignorance in myself, but, meat having formed no part of my diet in my earlier years, I did not then know what a chop was. It seemed, from all that was being said about it, to be an important thing, and I no doubt determined that I would inform myself about it at the first chance I had, preferably with my mother. We had started the meat course, and Mr. Meredith was carving the joint in front of him, when the discourse turned on the chop. What he said, and I remember it clearly, was that he wished no elaborate things. No man ever had simpler tastes than he. All *he* asked (presumably from life) was a chop, a simple chop, grilled, served piping hot—nothing more than that. In this primevally simple way he might be made happy; he asked no more.

It sounded all right. But I had a feeling that everyone was uncomfortable, and that Mrs. Meredith was positively unhappy; and when Meredith suddenly ordered

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the joint to be taken away, declaring it uneatable, the unhappiness spread to everyone except to me, who remained only mystified as to what all this was about. My mother was apparently doing her best to ease the situation, but she was doing it in a way that I did not quite understand, and she was not succeeding. I think she was a woman whom Meredith did not take to, just as he was a man for whom she had no instinctive liking. We passed on to the sweet, and my mother cautioned me with her eyes not to take too much of it; it was too rich for a small girl burdened with a poor digestion.

I felt that the dinner had, for some reason that was still not quite clear to me, not been a success, and I listened carefully to what Mrs. Meredith and my mother were saying on their way to the drawing-room. This did not greatly enlighten me. I could see that my mother's sympathies were wholly with Mrs. Meredith, and that she was trying to allay the disquietude from which our hostess was evidently suffering. (Is there anything that upsets a hostess more than to find that a meal she has taken some trouble to order and prepare has proved a failure?) How well I remember my feeling in that passage between the rooms, both that this is a most peculiar world—I still retain *that* sentiment—and also that something was going on which I was not meant to understand!

“That chop!” Mrs. Meredith was saying. “It has haunted me all my married life. There is no chop like that,” she continued, half addressing my mother and half the Creator of all things. “It doesn't exist in the world, but my husband won't stop talking about it.” She paused a moment, and then said something to the effect of “I don't know what I shall do.”

A Reminiscence of George Meredith

My mother's response to this was: Never mind; all men were like that. They always talked of chops, or something of the sort. With my father it was potatoes, which never, never, *never*, no matter where you got them or how you might cook them, could taste as the potatoes in his boyhood had tasted long ago, away up at the tip-top of Scotland. "They all do it," my mother said; "it's just their way. Their mothers cooked something or other in a special manner, and they have never tasted anything to equal it since. Don't mind it. It doesn't matter."

By the time we were through the passage and in the drawing-room, where the maid soon brought us coffee, I felt that Mrs. Meredith was comforted. I don't know that my mother was a feminist, but she nearly always did take the woman's part. Also, being of Puritan stock, she considered that food was not a thing to talk about in company, and that no husband should find fault with his wife except when things were "just between themselves".

Sympathy is dear to us all, and its effect on Mrs. Meredith in this case was unmistakable.

I remember sitting on one of those rather high stools that were a part of every Victorian drawing-room and turning the whole affair over in my mind. I had seen that my father, who had a strong liking for things to go smoothly, had been put out; I had felt dimly that my mother and Mr. Meredith weren't getting on; I had realized that Mrs. Meredith had been thoroughly upset, and I didn't know what it was all about. Nor was I sure that my mother would explain. I might be left in the dark, and I have always wanted to know things.

This is one of the two scenes that I have mentioned as

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being impressed on my memory. I see that dining-room, and Meredith's eager face flashing in the lamplight, and his wife looking—perhaps “daunted” would be the term, and my mother throwing oil on the troubled waters, not with conspicuous success so far as Meredith was concerned, though I think now that a fitting word from a woman he liked would have softened him and quickly ended the unpleasantness. I see myself, too, small and eager, thinking it would be nice to be grown up and understand things. As for the rest of that day, I remember nothing.

If the daughter whom I was to “play with” was there, I don't remember her, though, oddly enough, I can recall the maid in her Victorian uniform of black and white, carrying in the coffee that my mother frowned at me not to take. With that the scene fades out, just as a scene at a movie might do now, and the next thing that presents itself to me is a vision of myself being taken on the Sunday by Mr. Meredith to the Chalet where he did his work, with the promise that I should hear there something I would enjoy. He must have liked children, for I remember that, as I gambolled along beside him, I felt that sense of friendship towards him which children naturally feel towards people who have a taste for them. I regarded him as a very nice gentleman, though I don't remember anything that he said to me on our way; and I was sure I should enjoy the treat he was taking me to, whatever it might turn out to be. So far as I recollect, he and I were alone; at least no other human person was with us. But two little dogs, dachshunds in their sleek and beautifully fitting suits of fur, walked behind their master, one on each side of him.

The Chalet presents itself to me just as the dinner-

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table and the drawing-room do—like a scene in a play, with myself as one of the figures on the stage. Once we were inside, Mr. Meredith sat down, and I stood by his side, eagerly awaiting whatever was to come. The dachshunds had, I think, an inkling of what this was; they had that pleasant look, typical of dachshunds, of being delighted to do whatever may be asked of them. They were, like most dogs, gratified at being noticed at all, and at the first look and call of their master they came into line with one accord, ranged themselves before him, erected themselves on their hind legs, and, with perfectly straight backs (their “posture”, as we say now, was superb) and eyes intently fixed on him waited, as the men of the orchestra wait with their eyes on the conductor’s baton, *all* ready, every single inch of them alert to do what Nelson expected of every Englishman.

After a pause, just as at the beginning of an orchestral concert, the master gave the sign to the right-hand dog, who immediately produced from somewhere down in the depths of his being the deepest growling note that ever I heard emitted from a canine frame. His left-hand companion meanwhile kept erect, his eyes glued to his master’s face; you felt that his dog’s heart would break if he were to miss or falter over his entry-cue. In due time the moment came; Mr. Meredith turned to him and addressed him with the words, “And now let us hear Jacobus sing his sweet flute note.”

Forthwith Jacobus emitted as high a note as can ever, I think, have issued from a dog’s throat; and the two musicians continued their duet until the master raised his hand, and then they stopped. They evidently felt that they had deserved well of God and man, and when the rewarding biscuit was divided between them en-

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joyed it in the happy assurance that they were getting no more than they were entitled to.

"Now," Mr. Meredith said, as he turned to me and took my hands in his, "you have heard Brutus's loud bassoon" (I am a little doubtful now if the name was Brutus, but I am pretty sure that it began with a B) "and Jacobus's sweet flute note. How do you think they sing?"

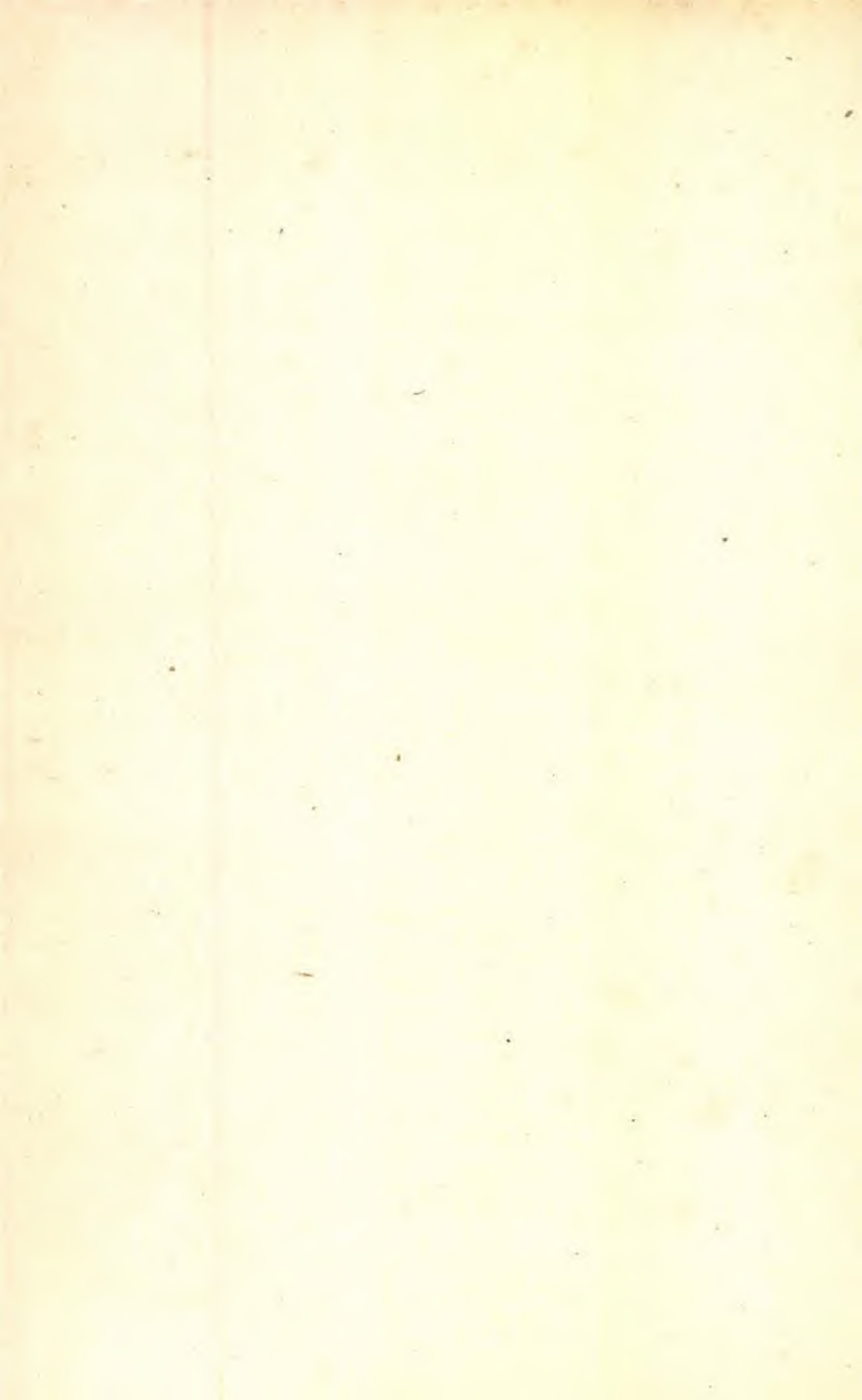
It is a queer thing, but I felt no fear at all, no shyness even, of this great writer. I felt him to be a friend. I told him what I thought of the dogs, and they came up and accepted our pats and my stroking hand, as concert stars accept the plaudits of their listeners. Dogs love to be accepted, and so do I; perhaps it is this common trait between us that makes us instinctively such good friends. I have always remembered this little afternoon scene, the pretty Chalet among the trees, the gentleness of my host, and the atmosphere of it all, which, small child as I was, I was able to appreciate to some extent, and which I recalled when, many years afterwards, I read and re-read *The Egoist*, and *Sandra Belloni*, and *The Amazing Marriage*, and some of the poems.

Yes, he must have been a very difficult man to live with. My mother never condoned his behaviour on that occasion, and steadfastly refused all further invitations to Box Hill; she said she did not wish to enter the house of a man who could make his wife so unhappy by harping on a chop that existed only in his imagination. She maintained firmly that the dinner reprobated by Meredith was in itself an excellent meal, only he didn't happen to like it. Geniuses are proverbially difficult, and the next most difficult thing after being a genius is to be a genius's wife. The man who wrote *Modern Love*

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couldn't be easy to live with, but just as a thousand years may seem as a day in the courts of the Lord, so, I think, a scenelet in the Chalet, lasting but a few minutes, might make up for years of unhappiness in a married life. It all depends upon how you look at things.

A Meeting with Henry
James at which Nothing
Happened



5. *A Meeting with Henry James at which Nothing Happened*

It was only a peep that I had of Henry James, but the impression of that peep has never worn off, and I should like to record the little incident here, because, slight as it was, it told me a good deal about him—far more, probably, than I should have learned had he talked to me for an hour in a drawing-room.

It was in Edinburgh that I got my peep of the author of *The Golden Bowl*. William James, Henry's brother, was in the city at the time, delivering the second course of his famous lectures on "The Varieties of Religious Experience", under the auspices of Edinburgh University. When this course was nearing its end, the philosopher's health, which had been affected by a heart attack in the previous year, gave his friends some cause for anxiety. Henry James was informed, and this it was that brought him on a brief visit from London to the Scottish capital. There was a strong bond of affection between the brothers; no one who saw them together could question that.

I may say, in passing, that I doubt if the Edinburgh of that day would have for Henry James the attraction it had obviously had, half a century or so earlier, for many of the notable men and women who visited it. He was perhaps too intensely civilized to be contented with

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what the city offered the stranger within its gates just then. Edinburgh was educated, it was intelligent, it was dourly and shrewdly circumspect, and it was also excessively capable of romance; but that isn't exactly being "civilized", and Henry James was civilized if ever a man was. Moreover, he came to Edinburgh, not in its summer season, when it is at its beautiful best, but in late autumn, when, too frequently, the shrill winds are up and away, and you may think yourself lucky if you can hold an umbrella against the pelting rain without its being blown inside out.

A good deal of correspondence and a larger number of telegrams than we were accustomed to in those days passed between the brothers before matters were finally settled. Henry wanted everything, down to the last, least detail, to be arranged in his own way. Suitable "accommodation" was to be bespoke for him, and he intimated quite clearly that while he was in occupation of it he would not wish to be visited by anyone but his brother. He also desired that no invitations from anyone to anything should be sent him; he was to be guaranteed a life of complete privacy. He wanted to be *alone*, except for his brother; and what a much simpler place this confused world of ours would be if everyone would state beforehand his likes and dislikes and other people would take the statement sensibly and not be offended! I must confess, however, that in this case the figuring out and arranging for what was and what was not to be done involved a deal of coming and going on the part of the Edinburgh agents, of whom I was perhaps the most active. I happened to be, at that time, secretary to the Scottish friend with whom William James was staying, and I should be sorry to say how often my feet were

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soaked and my umbrella blown inside out at recalcitrant street-corners while I was hastening to and fro to square the last veto hatched in the mind of Henry James with earlier instructions.

All was adjusted at last. The accommodation was ready to receive its guest, and the minds of the on-lookers in the background were duly attuned to complete inaction. This was a period, you must remember, when people drove about in carriages, leaving paste-board cards on other people, who in their turn did the same thing to their neighbours; but he would have been a bold man who had ventured to leave any such paste-board at the right-minded hotel in which Henry James was ensconced, and, so far as I am aware, no one attempted to do so, nor did anyone dare to suggest inviting the great man to a meal, though the Scots are a hospitable race and have always been fond of entertaining their friends handsomely.

For the first few days after his arrival, Henry James remained sequestered and undisturbed, and then something happened. John Morley was to deliver an important political speech at the Empire Palace Theatre, and William James's host had taken a box for the occasion. He—this host—was a very determined, not to say obstinate-as-a-mule, Scot, and no argument or persuasion could get it out of his head that it would be a nice thing to invite Henry James to a seat in that box. Nothing could wean him from the conviction that listening to a political speech by Lord Morley would be a treat to this distinguished novelist. My umbrella was again put to proof by the elements as I hurried to the hotel with one note and back to Charlotte Square with another, and then *da capo*. Finally Henry James agreed

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to accept the offered seat, provided (1) that he was to be allowed to sit in the back of the box, from which he could make an unobtrusive exit if he so desired, and (2) that no one was to greet him when he came in or to say good-bye to him as he went out. He would be completely alone.

The afternoon came, and five of us took our seats in the large box, four in chairs at the front, I in one of the two chairs at the back, from where I could hear John Morley, but not see him (nor did I specially want to). The other chair at the back, opposite to the one I occupied and close to the entrance door, had a better view of the platform; it was the chair on which we hoped our distinguished guest would sit.

At this time of my life I was—as, indeed, I still am—a steady and devoted admirer of Henry James, and I had spent much of my leisure in the previous eight or nine months in working my way from *Roderick Hudson* to *The Wings of the Dove*. You may imagine, then, the feelings of a young girl up to the throat in these novels and now with an immediate prospect of meeting their author. It is nice, I think, to be young and to be able to feel like that, even if it lays you open to disappointments.

The address which we had all come to hear was well on its way when, in the semi-darkness at the back of the box, I observed the door-handle turn. The door opened outwards, and I saw the *ouvreuse* standing in the passage with a burly man, who insinuated himself through the narrow entrance and came into the box. The door then closed again, as softly as it had opened. Except for pushing my chair a little further backwards against the wall, so as to leave as much room as possible, I sat motionless,

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and the burly man, hanging his dripping umbrella on a conveniently placed hook and his overcoat and hat on a neighbouring peg, took his seat on the hard and uncomfortable chair opposite mine. Henry James had come.

In the semi-darkness (the theatre lights had been turned down when John Morley began to speak) I could keep my eyes on the new-comer without attracting his attention, and could glean, I fancy, a good deal more than if we had been sitting in full daylight, when he could not have failed to notice that he was being observed.

The first bit of him that came under my inspection was his hands; they were white, and shapely, and ample—just the sort of hands that we like to see at the end of a man's arms. They couldn't have looked as they did if he had been in the habit of doing much with them in the way of what we are accustomed to call "useful work". He couldn't have had hands like that if he had been a bricklayer, or a cobbler, or a mechanic of any kind; they looked new, unworn. But if I could have seen the inside of his head—his brain—how worn *that* would have looked! Its condition, frayed and fatigued with worrying thought, as it must have been, would have told at a glance *why* he was not to be invited anywhere or rashly spoken to by anyone. That brain—and I wish I could have seen it!—would have explained and excused all his fussiness. "Don't bother me," it would have said. "Don't you see I am worn to a frazzle? I want to rest." If only we could see inside each other's heads, what a lot of trouble we should be spared! We should understand and be saved from tactlessness.

So far as I can recall, Henry James did not move,

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while he was seated in the box, except to uncross his legs and cross them the other way round. I don't know if he noticed that I was there at all. He did not seem to glance my way, or at the front row either, where his host and hostess, his brother, and, if I remember aright, his brother's wife were sitting. These all, not without a great effort, I am sure, behaved nobly. None of them glanced back when he came in, nor did any of them risk being turned into a pillar of salt when he eventually went out again. They judged, I suppose, that they had taken the pledge, so to speak, and must be total abstiners from greeting, talking, even looking, so far as Henry James was concerned.

When the statesman on the platform was evidently approaching what some of the surrounding Scots would have called his peroration, our silent guest rose, put on his overcoat and hat, detached his umbrella from its hook, gently opened the door of the box, and as gently closed it again from the outside, and then, presumably, went back to his seclusion at what we hoped was the best, as it certainly was the quietest, hotel in the town.

Oddly enough, I felt that I had got a great deal out of—can I call it my “contact” with the novelist. He was one of those people who can make their effect without saying or doing anything. I do not know how this is done, but I fancy that the men and women who have this power throw out something of themselves, diffuse the essence of themselves, as it were, in the air round about them, without being themselves conscious of what is happening. No one could have *done* less to impress his presence in that box in the old Edinburgh theatre, but that Henry James did give something to at least one of his neighbours is beyond dispute—something that has

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stayed with her through all the years between then and now.

I got the impression that life was not going smoothly with him just then, and that he was tired of it. He wasn't listening to John Morley any more than I was. He didn't like the theatre; he didn't like the chair he was on; he considered himself to be in the wrong company; and I was sorry for him, and at the same time couldn't but be conscious that there was something funny about him, too. But I also sensed, and with a certainty that nothing could have shaken, that the burly man beside me was very affectionate, very sensitive, intensely civilized; he *radiated* these qualities as he sat there in the semi-darkness.

I suppose I must have been affected by Henry James a little as the gentleman was by the lady whom he did but see passing by—though what I felt was on a different plane, for I didn't "love" him. Or are such experiences as this only the ends of something that has happened before, or the beginning of something that is still to happen? Henry James himself would have been interested in this question, and if John Morley had been discussing it, instead of making a political speech, all might have been different in our dark little *loge*. But we shouldn't have got any further on even then, for Henry James wouldn't have known anything more of the mystery than you or I do. I cannot but think, however, that he might have liked to talk about it. What an opportunity lost!



William James

6. William James

I

Among my recollections of some years of my life spent in Edinburgh one of the pleasantest is that of meeting William James and even, though in a somewhat cursory fashion, establishing a friendly acquaintance with him. During his visits to Edinburgh when he was delivering his Gifford Lectures at the University he was the guest of a friend of mine for whom I was then acting as private secretary. I was therefore constantly in and out of the house and, as a natural result of this, it was often possible for me to be of some little use to Professor James by running messages for him, as the Scotch say, and doing any other trifling commissions. I have never come across a mortal to whom I found it more delightful to render such small services. He received all that one had to give in a perfectly natural way, with no effusive gratitude but just as one friend treats another, and this made any kind of work done for him a pleasure to both parties.

This naturalness was evident throughout the lectures that he had been invited to give. They were given in two courses of ten lectures each, in 1901 and 1902, and were subsequently published in his famous book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. The University lecture-room where they were delivered, with its semi-circular rows

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of built-in, extremely hard and uncomfortable wooden seats extending from the floor upwards to the wall that faced the platform, was mainly occupied by students and members of the university staff but all the places they left vacant were filled by outsiders—"ladies" (we still spoke of "ladies" in those days though rather differently from the way in which we use the word now) desisting from their household duties or amenities and men leaving their business quarters to come and listen to the celebrated American professor. The place was filled at that first lecture and as the course went on, newcomers kept appearing on the scene, so that with every passing week we had to sit more and more closely together on those hard-hearted narrow benches with their insufficient backs. Students sat on the gangway spaces that led uphill to the topmost row of benches, but I doubt if any of us were at any time, except at the end of the talk, when we had to get up and go away, conscious of these physical discomforts; the lecturer held us too firmly under his spell. "And what spell was that?" you may ask. The spell, I would reply, of a friendly simplicity, the simplicity that can put the hardest thing before you so that you can understand it, combined with the spirit of what President Roosevelt used to call "neighbourliness". I have attended many lectures in my life but I remember none where I felt so much at home with, so at one with, the speaker or so assured that he *wanted* to make his audience understand and accordingly put himself in their place in order to do so. When a speaker feels like that, you may be certain that his audience will do its best to understand; it *listens*. I think you really could have heard the proverbial pin drop while these lectures were going on: we were all intent on picking up such

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crumbs as we could get and kneading them into such little loaves as we could make out of them. If a student came in late, how noiselessly he slipped to his place! I can recall the atmosphere of that lecture-room yet—tense and yet all-receptive. I remember how, when he remarked that Santa Teresa of Avila “flirted with God”, a quiver of I am not able to say exactly *what* emotion passed over and through the audience, largely composed as it was of rigid Presbyterian Edinburghians. We were much more bashful in our references to the Deity then than we are now, and I could feel the quiver I have spoken of *in* myself. I can recall too the mischievous expression of the lecturer’s eyes as he looked up at us over his glasses from the manuscript on his desk. He could have said anything even to that east-windy and west-endy Edinburgh audience and they wouldn’t have minded; and that is more than I could say of any other speaker known to me who came to Edinburgh in my time.

Once he brought an empty brief-case to the lecture-room; his manuscript had inadvertently been left at home. He began that lecture haltingly and hesitatingly but before he had gone very far he and his audience were, I think, even more at one than they had been on any other occasion. The lecture may not have given us exactly what the manuscript would have done, but that didn’t seem to matter: it was one friend speaking to another, and the fact that the speaker was so much cleverer and better informed than the rest of us didn’t seem to matter either. I should imagine that few Gifford Lecturers have been able to get into such close touch with their audiences and to awaken in them so warm a sense of personal affection as he did.

William James

2

It seems to be commonly ordained for us mortals that things in the second half of our lives are not so nice as they were in the first half. In his absence from Edinburgh in the summer following the delivery of his first course of the Gifford Lectures, William James suffered a heart attack—the first warning chime of the clock as its hands move to strike the hour. He spent that summer with Mrs. James in Europe, if I remember rightly, and when he returned to Edinburgh he looked different. Something had gone: the radiance that he had carried about with him everywhere was a little dimmed. He was just as nice as he had been before, just as sensitively considerate of the feelings of anyone to whom he might be talking, but I suppose no man can face directly, as it were, the prospect of his going away from here and entering the unknown without altering a little. We were all as fond of him as we had been on his first visit to us, but we were also a little sorry for him now. And if you are sorry for someone, you can't hide the fact, however much you may try to do so; the someone will be aware of it and the situation will be changed.

During his first visit to Edinburgh I had, as I have indicated, occasionally run little messages for him or re-typed a page or two of the manuscript he was revising, but that was about as much as I had been asked to do on his behalf. During his second visit, however, when he was visibly less able to cope with the duties he had so easily discharged the year before, I became for a time his informal secretary, if I may put it so, and worked with him more or less regularly, helping him to clear off

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batches of correspondence and so on. He had not quite completed the lectures of his second course and occasionally we had to straighten out some portion of one or another of them that seemed to carry itself a little crookedly. We used to settle down in the old library that looked out on Edinburgh's beautiful Charlotte Square, and he would think and think how this could best be done. While he was thus engaged it was my part to obliterate myself, but when he had thought out his thought, I was there at the big Densmore typewriter that served me so faithfully for thirty years, ready to take down his words. And then how kindly, how patiently he would dictate what he wanted to be put on paper! He was not patient because he *had* to be—that kind of patience is always hard to bear—but because he wanted to make things easier and more agreeable. I was happy when so occupied. I have had a long, almost half a century's experience of acting as a secretary and have worked for a considerable number of people, for though I have only had two actual "chiefs" all that time, they both of them "lent" me on various occasions to someone in need of secretarial services, and I have thus sampled at least a dozen men and one woman in this rôle. I can say with confidence that I have never had the good fortune to come into touch with any other "chief" at all like William James. He was as considerate a human being as the sun ever shone upon and he was also, though I am sure he was wholly unconscious of this, the most complete democrat I have ever met; he treated me as something entirely on a level with himself, intellectually as well as humanly. I naturally regarded it as a great treat to be able to be useful to him, and indeed it was something more than that. He had a way of "sharing" with

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you whatever he might be doing and so of infusing something of his personality into you without your being aware of it. At the time I am speaking of I did not find Edinburgh a congenial place to be in. I had been brought up in London and had only recently migrated to Edinburgh and I missed what the London of that period had to give. I was young and perhaps somewhat narrow and I did not see the virtues of Edinburgh. But the time that I spent with William James, the one and only wholly genuine democrat I have known, did much to make up to me for the drawbacks, as I then considered them, of my environment. To him I could say anything I wished to say, knowing that, whatever it might be, it would be hospitably received. In his sympathetic presence one's own personality faded into the background and was no longer a burden. He didn't talk about what ought to be; he *was* what ought to be. If this world were full of William Jameses, we should not need to struggle on here in our efforts to find happiness; we should be happy without more ado.

I cannot help feeling, as I end this little account of my connection with William James, that very little worthy of record may seem to have "happened" in it. But with people like William James it isn't exactly what they do, though they may do very important things, nor yet exactly what they say, though they often say very pregnant things, that really matters to most of us who are lucky enough to meet them. What matters to us is simply their having been *there*. They drop treasurable things round about them and some of these may fall upon us and enrich us. I fancy we all of us have a firm persuasion that if we had not come into touch with this or that person, life would not now be for us quite what

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it is. William James must have been such a person for a great many people, and I am not surprised that Henry James should have come to Edinburgh, when he evidently didn't want to do so, just in order that he might see this brother of his. Nor am I surprised that two men of such different temperaments should have been so strongly attached to each other. What does surprise me (and I venture to append this little personal note because the psychological oddity of its import might, I think, have interested both the brothers) is that if I had then been given the chance of being permanent secretary to one of them and the choice had been left to me, I would infallibly have chosen—no, *not* William, but Henry. What is more, I believe that I should make the same choice now. Why? I don't know. As secretary to William one would be happy. As secretary to Henry one would be bothered all the time. And yet, fully as I might realize this, Henry it would be for me. Perhaps if we could get to the bottom of things, we should discover that, when all is said, it isn't "happiness" we are after in this world. If we wanted to be happy and were fairly intelligent and reasonable about it, we could be. But we want something else, something to which I cannot put a name. With me it would be Henry all the time.

Six Red Roses
Across the Moon

7. *Six Red Roses Across the Moon*

I

So far as I remember, I have come into personal contact with only six Oriental women in the course of my life—two from China, one from Japan and three from India. The first of them, a Chinese lady, crossed my path when I was still a child, living with my parents in London. She had come over from Boston with a letter of introduction to my father from an American friend of his, Professor John Fiske, and her object in visiting England was to study the course of education for women here. She stayed for a few days in our house and she impressed me as an extraordinarily dignified figure. I particularly remember watching her descend the last flight of our stairs on her way to dinner, clad in her Chinese raiment. I, a small child, stood in the hall and watched her as she came, never giving a sign that she was walking on two feet but looking for all the world as if she were floating downstairs. That is a picture left on my memory for life. She was, as I say, enormously dignified, like something in a story-book, and I cannot recollect that she ever spoke to me during her visit, but all the same I liked very much to see her there; she made me feel that something was happening. She talked with my father and mother about things that I did not understand but I listened nevertheless and was

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possibly all the more impressed because I didn't understand. I have no remembrance of her taking any interest in my education; perhaps she thought it rather an amateur affair, conducted as it was partly by my mother and partly by tutors, for my father was old-fashioned enough not to care for schools for girls. Nor can I recall the name of our Chinese visitor, and what part of China she came from is quite unknown to me; I had at that time no idea of the immense size of China and its various provinces. She just descended upon me like a live vision and left imprinted on something inside me that picture, that moving picture, which has remained with me ever since. Never again have I seen anyone come down a staircase with anything like that dignity; it was prodigious, and a little of it would not be amiss to-day. I wonder what that imposing Chinese woman would think of the education of our modern women. Would she think it an improvement upon that of the East when she was a girl? She is a fine figure of the past and I like to think of her; that is why I mention her here.

We had another visitor from the East in my childhood, and she also came via Boston, bringing my father another introduction from John Fiske. She was from Japan and she too came in quest of facts concerned with English women's education. She was, as I remember her, small, extremely elegant, and choice in her movements. She was companionable and took a good deal of notice of me, telling me about her country and its customs; and I think it is odd that, although she was so friendly and the Chinese lady had been so distant, it was to China that I always felt determined to go "when I grew up". I *liked* the Japanese lady the better of the two, she was so very kind, but China, the country of which our Chinese

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visitor had been the emblem, was for me the "real place" and I always wanted to see it. The human mind is a queer thing and man, with all his cleverness, has never been able to fathom it. I never have been to China and I regard this as a lacuna, a regrettable lacuna, in my life; and now, I suppose, the China that our guest represented no longer exists. She represented it by nothing but just by being what she was, and probably that is the best way. Have you not often found that words spoiled what was on the way to being a beautification? I have. I remember that as a child I used to say that I wished the animals—we kept a good many "pets" in our house—could speak, and my mother always said, "Be thankful they can say nothing. If they could speak they would be unbearable." I think she got hold of a truth there.

Before taking leave of my Japanese friend I must describe an hour she spent in showing me how to plan a vase of flowers in the Japanese way. This accomplishment was then taught at Japanese schools, and in her school-days she had, she told me, gained a prize for one of her showings. She regarded the English mode of arranging flowers without comment but not, I think, without inward criticism. Her manners were excellent but I would say now that a lot of thinking went on behind them without any indication of the subjects investigated or the conclusions reached. Her technique of life was as different from the Chinese lady's as it was from that of my Scottish mother. They all *felt* the same but they expressed their feelings in different ways. East and West could meet half-way and come to a good understanding with one another.

It had never occurred to my small mind that flowers needed any arranging—not at any rate the kind of

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arranging that you would need to have lessons about at school. But the Japanese lady took my mind a stage farther on. The flowers provided for the occasion were lilies of the valley, from which I infer that it was in the spring-time, the only pretty ring-time, that she stayed with us. We sat, she and I, in our big dining-room, and we had before us a vase, a Japanese glass vase of my father's, filled with water and waiting for what it was about to receive. The lilies lay in a bunch on the table, each with its green blade attached to it, and she picked them up one by one, held each flower in one hand and with the fingers of the other massaged its stalk and foliage for five or ten minutes or sometimes even longer, until the exact form desired by her had been given to the sprig. She then placed the sprig in the vase, continuing to massage it until it had bent exactly as she wished it to do. It was not a vase of flowers that she was arranging; it was a picture that she was composing. We did not speak. I felt that she—the part of her that I was accustomed to converse with—was engaged, deeply engaged, and not to be disturbed or interrupted in any way. Having a father and mother both of whom earned money by what we call “writing”, I was used to keeping quiet and not interfering when grown-ups were about their business. I sat, deeply impressed, and looked on until the making, if that is the right word, of the vase was fully and fairly achieved. And when she turned round to me at last and smiled, I asked her, “Will they stay like that?” and the way she looked at me and nodded gave me an idea—an idea that I certainly did not express to myself in any words—of her mastery over *things*. She differed in this respect from my Chinese lady, who also, though I naturally made no attempt at that time to put

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what I felt about her into words, had shown a mastery of her own over things. *Her* mastery was over the spirit of things, if such a phrase is permissible. She seemed somehow to get inside things and so to influence them, while the Japanese lady operated on their outside. Perhaps this may suggest why it was to China rather than to Japan that I felt drawn; China's representative had, as I can now see, impressed me deeply with her sense of dignity and honour, and it was her country and people that I wished to visit.

Both these women spoke clear and elegant English, and their way of speaking, their way of dressing, and their extreme politeness, expressed in quite different ways, towards my father and mother must have had a strong effect upon me, however unconscious I may have been of it at the time. I didn't *understand* either of them; you wouldn't expect it, but they gave me a lot to think about, and, as you see, I am thinking yet. They opened a door so that I could get a peep into what lay behind it, and the other four ladies from the East, whom I now proceed to describe, pushed the door a little wider open, so that I could look further in. I wish I could have gone inside and seen what was there but evidently that was not to be for me in this life. I hope some other life may show me something more of what interests me so much.

2

After these two early encounters I fell in with no more Oriental women for at least a score of years, and by that time I had crossed the Atlantic Ocean and was settled in Montreal. The first of my new quartet to come there hailed from India. Her name was Shushama Tagore and

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no prettier object than she could possibly have been presented for human eyes to rest upon. We met at an afternoon reception that her hostess for the week-end in Montreal was giving for her, and as she approached me through the crowd of intervening women she certainly looked like something from another sphere. She wore, very gracefully, a beautiful *sari*, she walked with elegance, and her smile seemed to radiate all over the room. I asked her, as an opening for our conversation (and I suppose that pretty well everyone else did the same) if she was a daughter of Rabindranath Tagore and she replied with some emphasis, "No, I am his niece. My father writes just as good poetry as my uncle does but nobody seems to read it here. Why is that?" I felt that in her place I might have made much the same reply and that Kipling had known what he was talking about when he made his remark about women being sisters under their skins. Shushama and I would, I imagine, have been considerably at variance in our sizings-up of life but we should have found certain subjects upon which our feelings—so much more important than our "opinions"—would have been identical; and the subject of "fathers" was evidently one of these. I think we both perhaps felt that we would "get on".

Shushama was to give a lecture on the following night, a Sunday, and it was to be held in a Unitarian church. The church was large, the audience was faithful and I felt that I would like, in my capacity as chairwoman to Shushama, to learn something of what she intended to say, but when I put the question to her she only replied, "I am not very sure." I said that I supposed her lecture would have to do with the position of women in India or something of the sort, but she just said again,

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"I am not sure. You will hear what it is about to-morrow night." I had, as it happened, never "taken a chair" before and I had only been persuaded to do so on this occasion by the solicitations of a friend, but as I glanced at Shushama I realized that I should have to be satisfied with the reply I had received. She was charming, she was pliant and she was as pretty as could be, but she also knew her own mind and managed things in her own way. So with some misgivings I left her, and as I walked home I thought that I had never met anything quite like her before. She struck me as "new", and the only reason I could find for this was that, in so far as she went she was *complete*. I wondered if in the past Western women too had been complete, not of course in all cases but in some, and if their present incompleteness is due to an education that they have, so far, found to be a little indigestible. Shushama, I would say, had not a great deal of knowledge but what she did know she knew. Are you acquainted with many Western women of whom you could say so much? I am not. They have broken through the fenced area within which they once found themselves confined, and now that they are outside they are uncertain and distressed. They feel themselves a little as I, who have no bump of locality, feel when I am alone in a strange city; they don't know whether to take the first turning to the right, as the man they asked told them to do, or to follow the directions given a little later by the woman who assured them that the quickest, indeed the only, way to the place they wanted to reach was by taking the third turning to the left. Shushama Tagore had no need of such assistance from anyone. She was still, if I may use the expression, just as she had come out of the egg. She was small and perhaps not specially well-

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informed but what there was of her was all in one piece and not disposed in fragments along the way. I thought, "She will manage nicely to-morrow evening. I shan't need to interfere with her at all." Little did I know.

We met, that next evening, on the very steps of the church in which she was to give her lecture. I should not, from her appearance, have expected her to be punctual, and I doubt if she had been born with that valuable virtue full-grown in her; I fancy she was naturally of a gay and even frolicsome disposition, which had been disciplined by an education of somewhat rigorous convention, so that now, whatever the temptation, she would do the "right thing". I felt that she could be trusted to handle any situation with grace and dexterity. Could one say anything more complimentary than that about anyone?

She drew near me, looking—I think "demurely gay" is the phrase that would best describe her; and demureness and gaiety combined make a very delightful human dish. She had evidently given consideration to the subject of dress; her *sari* was even more beautiful than the one she had worn on the previous afternoon, and with what grace she wore it! I hope that the "new idea" will not deprive Indian women of that delightful garment. As we entered the vestry we heard from the church the sounds of the organ on which the church organist was playing the audience in.

"Is it big, the church?" Shushama asked me.

"I think it holds about 600 people," I replied, and then she asked me, "For how long should I speak?" and I said rather anxiously, "Aren't you going to read it?"

"No," she said, and she shook her head, "I just give it," and at this point they gave us the signal to come into

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the church; the organ had stopped playing. As we went in together she whispered in my ear what she had said the day before, "I am so glad it is you. You and I will give a lovely lecture together. I know it. And how lucky I am!"

I had no time to wonder what she meant for we had reached the chancel, where two chairs were set out for us. After the organist had stopped playing, there had been a pause and as we walked in he had struck up again; now that we had sat down he was just approaching the close of his recital, and this gave me the chance to point out to my—shall I call her my charge?—that the pulpit was empty and that she was welcome, if she was so minded, to step up into it and speak from there; otherwise she need only rise from the chair on which she had been sitting and address her audience from where she was. Rather to my surprise she chose the former alternative, and when the organist had stopped playing and my short introduction had been given, up she climbed into the pulpit and very unusual she looked when she got there. It was, I imagine, the first time in its life that that pulpit had had to accommodate itself to a *sari* with a woman inside it and perhaps it showed its astonishment at the arrangement; at any rate its occupant looked very unusual and very pretty. She stood smiling for a moment and then began to address her audience much as a child might address a nursery audience if only a child could know how. Here again, as in her odd mixture of complete naturalness and extreme convention, you got a queer feeling of—was it newness? Or was it untold antiquity, with something quite new being poured on the top of it? She addressed her large audience frankly, cheerfully, most unselfconsciously, as a nurse might tell

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town children of her own early life in the country. With her "So it was when I was a child" Shushama Tagore transported us to a land where most of us had never been.

Well and good. I wondered why I had been so nervous about the lecture. The people were listening quietly and happily; they were not at all tense. Some of them indeed—those, I suppose, who go to lectures in order to have a sleep—were duly asleep. The others were lending or not lending their ears as the fancy prompted them. The atmosphere was what I may perhaps call the lecture-atmosphere, with which all of this generation must have some acquaintance. I was just preparing to join the others in their drowsy pleasure when the lecturer stopped. Yes, she stopped entirely short. The church became suddenly so quiet that all the sleepers woke up, and then I saw that she was making signs to me to come close to the pulpit. She was perfectly decorous; she was just slightly waving her hand, and her eyes said, also quite decorously, "Do come! I want to speak to you." I rose from my chair and went towards the pulpit—only a few steps but in the course of them I mentally envisaged, I think, all the possible tragedies that might happen at such a moment as we were all of us now facing.

"What do you think," Shushama said when I was at an easy speaking distance from her, "what do you think I had better tell them now? What would interest them?" She was leaning over the side of the pulpit so that she might speak confidentially to the person whom, as I now realized, she regarded as her fellow lecturer. There was no one asleep in the church now. The very organist had come back from the distant chair in which *he* went to sleep every Sunday until it was time for him to play

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the audience out again. He was right in front of the keyboard of his instrument, keen expectation in his glance. The audience was sitting forward on its seats, all eyes, all ears. The atmosphere was tense now, everywhere except round about Shushama Tagore and me. There it was sublimely peaceful up in the pulpit and somewhat unhappy underneath.

“Do you think”, Shushama went on meditatively, “that a description of our marriage ceremonies would interest them?”

I gave thanks to God in my heart and said to her that I felt sure such a description would be welcome to everybody.

“Then I will begin”, she said, “with singing the marriage song.” And changing the note of her voice she continued in a business-like tone, “Please ask the gentleman at the organ to give us the note A.” She thought for a second and then added, “Please let him sound the chord and repeat the note several times. And I shall sing.”

I turned my eyes to the organist and called to him, “Will you please give us the note A,” and was about to continue my message when I was interrupted by his giving the note clearly, several times, and then sounding the chord in a very musical way. I could see in his face when he looked across at me, after playing, that he was delighted to be in the picture; his expression said as plainly as words, “Ask me to do anything. I shall love it.” So he now, as well as myself, was “giving the lecture”. Nor was the audience excluded; it too felt that it was in the ring, not standing outside, as is the usual way with audiences; and it liked that very much. All were agog. And when Shushama lifted up a very sweet little

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voice and sang a song in a language that we didn't understand and to a music unlike any that most of us had ever heard before, we all listened, rapt, and when she had ended gave her a round of applause that would have made the heart of any lecturer go pit-a-pat. I went back to my chair.

After that "we" did the lecture together. I acted as a sort of language expert in the Intelligence Department; when Shushama was at a loss, she called me, and I ceased to be in the least self-conscious or nervous. I and the organist and the entire audience, down to the young man who had shown them to their seats, all felt that we were intrinsically involved in giving the lecture, and when at last I rose to thank the lecturer we all, collectively as well as individually, took to ourselves, and as well earned, part of the gratitude I offered her. I never was at a lecture where the audience enjoyed itself so much, and several people said to me afterwards that it was "lovely" to watch Shushama and me colloquing; she up in the pulpit, looking down on me, and I on the chancel floor looking up at her, made them feel, they said, as if the extreme East and the extreme West were meeting at last, so Kipling was off the mark for once. She descended from the pulpit, not flushed, not warm, just smiling and demurely gay, as she had gone up into it. "I told you", she said, almost affectionately, I think, "that it would be a success. I knew that we could do it together, you and I."

Apparently, then, she was in the habit of giving lectures like that—lectures in which the whole audience more or less co-operated—and for a while it seemed to me that this is perhaps the way to "do the lecturing trick", but for a while only. Before long I came to the

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conclusion that Shushama's method wouldn't do as a daily diet. She succeeded on this occasion because she was so utterly unself-conscious and so unaware that she was doing anything unusual and because her audience was so taken by surprise; her procedure, combining with her prettiness, caught them off their guard and they forgot to be what audiences at lectures almost always are—intensely critical.

I remember Sir Norman Angell once saying to me *apropos* of giving a lecture, that what he would like to do, if he could choose, would be to take a quarter of his allotted time in order to lay before his audience a *précis* of the thesis he was dealing with and then to devote the remaining three-quarters to the asking of questions by his listeners and the answering of them by himself. "In that way", he said, "the audience would get what it *wants*. As things are, I never know whether I have given it what it wants or not." This sounded well as he said it, but after listening to audiences asking questions on several occasions, I cannot help wondering if many of the questioners would be capable of asking Sir Norman Angell anything they really wanted to hear or of putting their questions in a form that he could respond to satisfactorily. When he speaks for a full hour he does assuredly get some of his listeners somewhere, but if he were to spend three-fourths of the time allowing his audience to run the show, would anyone get anywhere at all? I wonder.

One of the pleasant offices discharged by the P.E.N. Club, which has branches in so many countries of the

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world, is to entertain in a friendly spirit, whenever a suitable opportunity of doing so is offered, the men and women of any nationality who have made a name for themselves in some form of literature. Montreal has been one of the branch centres of the P.E.N. Club for a quarter of a century, and in the earlier period of its history—in the year 1928, to be precise—the members of this centre had the privilege of securing Madame Sarojini Naidu, the Indian poetess, as a guest at one of its dinners. “The Indian poetess” I have called her, but I might equally well have spoken of her as “the English poetess”, for her English poems, of which two or three volumes were published in the early part of this century, won high praise from some of the best critics of the day. They dealt largely with themes taken from the ordinary life of her native country and though they are, I fancy, little read to-day, the beauty of their form and the charm of their spirit have given them an assured place in Anglo-Indian literature. And Sarojini Naidu has a place in Anglo-Indian history too, for she did much for the emancipation of her countrywomen and played an active part in the political movement which has led to the independence of India. She, then, is the fourth of my little band of Eastern ladies and I hope I may be able to suggest in words something of the impression that my meeting with her made on me. I was at that time Secretary of the Montreal P.E.N. and when she arrived at the building where we were to dine and I had welcomed her, I asked her, rather timidly, I think, how her name should be pronounced. She smiled at me (and she had a speaking smile) and said, “At college they always called me ‘Sarah Jane’,” and with a laugh she went on, “If you find any difficulty with Sarojini, call me that too.” The

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“college” she referred to was Girton College, Cambridge, where she had spent some years in her youth.

Her manner, her way of speech, was so kind, and, if I may use the word, “embracing”, that I took her to my heart at once, and there she has remained ever since. A clever and well-instructed woman without airs of any kind is to my mind one of the nicest things on earth. I am perfectly certain that Madame Naidu must have learned easily whatever she wanted to learn, remembered it without effort and distinguished herself both in her classes and her examinations, but no one who met her casually and listened to her conversation would have thought for a moment of associating her with scholastic attainments. Whatever learning she had she carried so lightly that it would need a perceptive eye to see that she was carrying anything at all. She was just herself, and considering her early environment as the daughter of an aristocratic house that clung to the old native traditions—her desire to be “educated”, I believe, caused horror in her family—this was perhaps the most remarkable thing about her. She must have been very aristocratic indeed to withstand the pressure of centuries as she did.

The dinner we gave her was held at the premises of a well-known Montreal club, in a large and very beautiful dining-room designed by an American architect. The room was well lighted and the table was well set, and I think we were about twenty in number. Sarojini Naidu accepted the scene with evident pleasure and added to *our* pleasure by her appearance. She had, graven on her forehead the Red Star, the prescriptive mark of the ancient Indian nobility whose origin goes back beyond a certain period. I remember noticing it at the point where the right eyebrow branches off from the nose;

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it seemed shining red on her dark skin. She wore her native costume, a *sari* that seemed to at least one of us to be even more beautiful than the two beautiful *saris* that Shushama Tagore had worn. Somehow, as I looked at it and its wearer from my place at the other side of the dinner-table, they affected me like something in a dream. She was talking to a man who had once confessed to me that he was very easily bored, but there was no sign of boredom on his countenance now; it was radiant. And she, smiling, decorous, and yet—I can think of no better epithet for her as she then appeared to me than “abounding”—was not only taking in all the conversation but was sharing it with him too. She gave him all the chances he could have wished to play it as he would and only cast in her own particular little *motif* when the music was in time and tune, and then his face lit up as he looked at her. What a lot our human eyes can express! “Well,” I thought, “thank goodness *you* are happy,” for it was he who had ordered our dinner for us and I knew he had taken special trouble for the occasion.

When dinner was over and cigarettes and coffee appeared on the scene I noticed that our guest obviously wished to speak to me. Her eyes said as plainly as words could have done, “Come over to me. There is something I want to ask you, something that I cannot call across the table. Do come!” So I went round the table and bent over her shoulder and she said to me in a low voice, “Please tell me the exact truth. I love to write verses. Do you think that they”—and she motioned towards the company round about—“would like me to recite some of them? Or not? It is just that I would like, if I could, to give a little pleasure where I have enjoyed

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myself so thoroughly." After a moment she added, "I have translated some of them into English. I could perhaps start with those in my own tongue and follow with the translations."

I have never come across anything like her manner. She was absolutely natural, absolutely herself, as she said this; her manner of speech, of movement, of complete repose, was her own. I don't know if there are many women like her in India, for I have never, alas, been there, but if there are, what a charming country to be in!

She recited her verses, and it is so that I have my picture of her. When she began, those beside her drew their chairs a little away from the table so that she might have room and verge enough; and there she sat, she and her *sari* and her romantic eyes, and told us of the thoughts that had come to her out of her heart and taken shape in the verse of her native tongue. And then she gave us the poems in English. I doubt if they were "great"; I do not imagine that she was an Indian Mrs. Browning or Christina Rossetti, but we did not criticize or wish to criticize. The evening, the room, the light coming down on her, and she herself, an illustrious figure in a life-poem—with all this before our eyes and with the sonorous, organ-like tones of her voice in our ears, how should we not have simply surrendered ourselves to the charm of the moment? It was all so easy; it was one of those moments when life itself seems easy and we can forget the suffering which has made such an idealized vision of life a possibility, if only for the fleeting instant.

That really is all that there is to my picture of this Indian woman sitting in that beautiful room and merely being herself. I don't know if she impressed the other members of our society who were present on this occa-

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sion as she did me; none of them have spoken on the subject to me since, but then I myself have never until now attempted to express what I felt about her. England had put its mark on her, of course; one could hardly be young and take a university course, as she had done, constantly consorting with human creatures of another race from one's own, without being affected and somewhat changed by the experience. Just as, for that matter I myself was, in a sense, changed by this one meeting with Sarojini Naidu. She and Shushama Tagore and the two Chinese women of whom I have still to speak opened doors to me through which landscapes of minds different from my own, in many ways, though perhaps fundamentally akin, were revealed to me. They all, and the two Eastern ladies of my childhood also, showed me, without of course realizing that they did so, aspects of woman's landscape of which I had previously been quite unaware. I wonder if I did anything of the sort to any of them. If so, what kind of landscape can it have been? What kind of landscape do we Western women have to display to our sisters of the East?

When Madame Naidu said good-bye to me that evening, she thanked me with a sincerity and a grace that I shall not forget. She told me that she had enjoyed herself, that she had felt "at home", and that if I would come to India she would try to return the hospitality which she had received from us, and in the same friendly spirit. And so we parted.

If I may elaborate a little this very inadequate account of the impression made upon me by Sarojini Naidu I would say that she aroused in my imagination a curious sort of persuasion that she must once have been an empress, very powerful, very beautiful and very great, as

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greatness is regarded on this earth. It seemed to me that the woman whom I looked at that night in the Montreal Club had never forgotten her empress incarnation; she remembered it (without of course being conscious of the remembrance) and still unwittingly displayed the past empress in the present "herself". What the empress may have been like I cannot tell, but Sarojini was made in the tragic mould; it seemed to me, as I regarded her, that tragedy was implicit in her whole bearing. I have no notion why I should have felt so about her; she looked gay enough, even happy, and indeed I think she *was* happy at the moment. She was, I am sure, a woman capable of a great love, and the capacity for such love almost inevitably brings tragedy in its train. If I were asked to describe her in one word, the word of my choice would be "romantic". She was, I felt, a "woman with a story". I may add that I have never in the course of a long life come across any other woman who affected me in just that way, for I am not one of those who fix "a story" on everyone with whom they meet. I can think of women in history of whom I might have conceived a similar idea if I had met them—Mary Stuart, for instance, and perhaps Charlotte Corday. Shakespeare evidently fell in with women of this type; if he had not, Lady Macbeth would not live in our minds as she does, no, nor Cleopatra either. If there had been a Shakespeare about on that night when Sarajini visited us, another unforgettable heroine might have been born and brought to life by him to play her part on the stage, or if Ibsen had been one of our company, yet another arresting figure might have been added to his troop of memorable women. It is when we come into touch with a woman of Sarojini Naidu's stamp that we realize why

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men, up and down the ages, have always written and always will write plays and novels about women "like that".

4

I had thought that it would be the easiest thing in the world to give a short account of my fifth Oriental sister and that I could set down in a few sentences the little that I have to tell of her. No idea could have been farther from the actual fact. I have had a dozen tries at getting even the roughest sketch of this Chinese lady on to paper and the more I try the more she eludes me, and so I have come to the conclusion that the less I say about her the better it will be for all of us. After all, how could anyone expect me to understand a lady of ancient Chinese stock, an aristocrat, one who had earned her living, while it was still possible to do so, as a lady-in-waiting to the late Dowager Empress of China? I have, alas, never been in China and I know little of the royal customs in any country. Towards this quondam lady-in-waiting, next whom I once sat for a while at a dinner which was offered to her by our Montreal P.E.N. Club, I immediately felt warmly friendly. In China she had been rich and influential; now she was, like so many others in this woeful century of ours, in an alien land, poor and presumably friendless. I would have liked to be nice to her, as nice as possible, but *how* to be nice I did not know, and probably she had just the same feeling to me, but what an ocean of difference lay between us! How could we approach one another? And how can I convey at all, in the little sketch that I would so much like to make of her, any inkling of the *rapprochement* that

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did, I think, make itself felt between us? I can only put down in a poor plain way the few plain facts I am in possession of and beg for a sympathetic reading of them. I am not competent to approach in any worthy fashion a lady whose very name I am unable to spell. Here are the facts.

The only significant object that she carried about with her was worn on her head; I had never seen anything like it before and I do not know what it should be called—a monument or an erection might be an appropriate term for it. The thought occurred to me that as she had put it on she must have had an idea that it would interest us, and I therefore ventured at last to allude to it and to inquire whether it had any reference to her former profession.

“Yes,” she said, smiling, and I saw that she was pleased at my inquiry; this object *had* been donned with the idea of arousing our interest and perhaps giving us pleasure. “It is what we all had to wear when in attendance on our Royal Mistress.” She put her hands to her head and raised the structure an inch or two from her very elaborately arranged hair. “It weighs forty pounds,” she went on, “and we were often six hours or more in attendance. We were not of course allowed to sit down, and the forty pounds sometimes seemed difficult to bear.”

She took her hands down from her head-dress and looked at me smilingly. She had a most agreeable smile; like all else about her it betokened goodwill tempered by restraint. Her way of talking reminded me of that other Chinese lady of long ago of whom I have given a little description; this younger sister seemed to me to approach life as if she were constantly coming down an

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interminable stair without giving anyone so much as a glimpse of her feet all the way from top to bottom.

"You wore a head-dress weighing forty pounds!" I cried, "and for hours on hours together! I find that inhuman."

"It was the custom," she responded, still with a smile. "It had to be." She paused and then, with a gravity that I shall never forget, she said, "The Empress was our Royal Mistress. What she wished was our wish too. No one of us could separate herself from her." In such a tone must Mary Beaton and Mary Seaton and Mary Carmichael and "Me" have spoken of *their* Royal Mistress. I thought to myself, as I looked at the very simply dressed woman beside me with her cast of countenance and her bearing that bespoke a nationality and an upbringing so different from ours, "We are all the same within. Stir our emotions and we will follow where they lead, though it be to the death. To wear forty pounds of torture on our heads seems a joy when the burden is borne for one whom we love." And the Dowager Empress of China and Mary Stuart seemed one, and the lady that I was sitting beside and I likewise seemed one. I fancy that the same thought, or perhaps I should say a similar thought, travelled through her mind at the same moment.

"I thought", she said rather shyly, "that you might like to know our customs," and I had a vision of her hesitating, before she came to dine with us, whether she would wear her forty-pound hat or not, and then she smiled again as our eyes met and she said, "I am glad that I decided to put it on."

"And so am I," said I.

We might not "understand" each other but we were

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friends. I believe that if ever this world of ours is to become "one", it will only be when the nations approach each other in this spirit. "We cannot understand," the nations must say, "but perhaps we can like one another." That way, I think, union lies. When our Chinese guest and I parted at the end of the evening and our hands, so differently coloured and so differently formed, met, I felt that we both knew that we had had a moment of union, of real understanding, and that we should never forget it.

5

I took a fancy to Mrs. Funk when I first saw her coming in at the door to a luncheon party that the Press women of Montreal were giving to her husband and herself. Mr. Funk had recently been sent over to Canada by his Government to study the Canadian railway system, and as I glanced at his wife it struck me that she too might have been sent over as supplementary ornament, if I may put it so. They were both of them extremely prepossessing in appearance. If Mr. Funk wasn't handsome, he was certainly not plain; he was a well-set-up young fellow with an intelligent expression, and one thought, as one looked at him, "Well, I shouldn't wonder if there is something very capable and good in you, though it mayn't have come out yet." Mrs. Funk was charming; she was on the *petite* scale but beautifully formed, and as she smilingly entered the room in her Chinese dress, she made as aesthetic a little picture of a woman as I have ever set eyes on. She was made-up; there was no disguising that fact, but her make-up, like her dress, was Chinese and did not in the least impair

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her charm. It somehow seemed natural for her to make-up and one accepted her tinting and shading with pleasure and admiration, much as one accepts the glowing feathers of some wonderful exotic bird. I could observe her at leisure, for we sat opposite each other at the luncheon-table, and as soon as the meal came to an end and we were changing seats I crossed over and took a chair at her side. And then, rather to my surprise, I saw, when she began to speak to me, that there was plenty of intelligence behind the dye and paint and powder of the little face that was so effectively framed in the thick and elaborately arranged black hair that surrounded it.

I had always unconsciously retained in my mind the vision of my first Chinese friend—our visitor of long ago, who came downstairs without giving anyone a glimpse of her feet—as the pattern of what a Chinese lady would look like. And nothing could have been more unlike that representative of an earlier era than this young Chinese girl of the present day. When I say “present day”, I am speaking of some twenty years ago, for it must have been in the late ’twenties or the early ’thirties that Mrs. Funk and I met. But what a change even that little cycle of years had brought about! What had been happening to the women of China in the twenty or thirty years prior to this meeting? A lot of them, Chinese and Japanese too, had gone travelling in foreign lands to see how the problem of Woman—always, I suppose, a difficult one—was dealt with in Europe and America. What these travellers had at heart, I imagine, was to promote in their fellow-sisters no less than in themselves a fuller sense and recognition of the dignity of woman. To their minds “education” was the surest way of making Woman conscious of herself, and

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when they got back to their own countries they often devoted their lives to carrying this idea into effect, so far as they could. The Mrs. Funk whom I talked to that day was, at any rate up to a point, an embodiment of their wishes. There she sat beside me, entirely unconscious of what had given her the right to sit there, and kept an eye alertly open to anything that might prove helpful to her in what she evidently regarded as her proper vocation—the little business career of her own which she wanted to run concurrently with that of her husband, so that she might be on a par with him and contribute her share to the family exchequer.

I soon learned more about this enterprise of hers, for before we parted that afternoon we had become friends and she had asked me to come and see her at the little furnished flat that she and her husband had rented. I accepted her invitation with cordial pleasure and she instantly named a day. On the afternoon appointed I made my way to the address she had given me, ascended to the fourth floor of the building by means of the little elevator which I had to regulate myself, and was met by her at the door of her flat. She took me into the small sitting-room and I sat down, at her invitation, and regarded the prospect, which was a mixed one. The Canadian idea of what belonged to this type of flat was apparent in the cheap, factory-made tables and chairs, the tinted walls, the window-curtains and similar furnishings, but the Chinese idea was plain to see in everything that the Funks had added to the household goods they were renting. The first thing that caught my eye was a long panel hanging on the wall with the picture of a Chinese sage—a holy man—and his small attendant or “chelah”. The ugly couch was covered with lovely Chinese embroi-

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deries; embroidered cushions, equally lovely, were superimposed on the crude, workaday cushions placed on the chair-seats; and a tea-set or part of one—two cups and their accompaniments—was set out on a table. I had a slight surface knowledge of Chinese pottery, for my father had been a collector of such ware, and I could recognize its charm and beauty. I sat there, looking round rather vaguely and feeling, I daresay, a little as Alice might have felt when she first stepped through the looking-glass. Two different ways of life had come together with Mrs. Funk's handling of them, and I was slightly confused. She herself was in Chinese dress and perfectly in accord with the Ming tea-set. "Do you like our flat?" she asked me after a moment. "We love it. It has such a lovely bathroom. I must show it to you afterwards. But first we will have tea, won't we? Excuse me a minute and I will go and make it."

She disappeared into what, I imagine, was a kitchenette and came back a few moments later, bearing in her hand a most adorable tea-pot which, if only speech had been granted to it, could have poured out for us, I am sure, a stream of memorable history from far-back times. We sat down at the little table, so artistically set out, and what the tea-pot did pour out for us into the small, exquisitely coloured, wholly unadorned cups without handles was a pale, honey-coloured liquid that looked absolutely innocuous. I, who had just been shopping and was now panting for a "real" cup of tea in a brown tea-pot, felt somewhat desolate as I surveyed it. I thought, "*That* won't pick me up!" (Let me say parenthetically that at 3 a.m. on the following night I painfully learned how utterly mistaken I had been in thinking so; I realized then that one cup of this amber-coloured bever-

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age had more power in its grip than twenty brown tea-pots full of ordinary tea, and I knew *why* Ming cups are small.)

"I mean to use these cups while I am here," my hostess said confidentially, "and when we leave I shall sell them. Do you not find them very beautiful? They should bring a good sum. And I mean", she went on still more confidentially, "to sell all the Chinese things that you see here. I have brought trunkfuls of treasures with me—embroideries, raiment"—she occasionally used an unlikely word—"pictures, ornaments. I shall let you see them before you go. And you will please tell your friends what there is here for sale. I shall make money," she said, and her voice, as she spoke these words, had a kind of certainty in it that I find it impossible to convey, "I shall work up a big business in the end between here and China. Chinese things I shall sell here. American and Canadian things I shall carry back and sell there."

I thought, as I listened to her, "And this is the little damsel whom I took to have nothing in her head!" There she sat in her Chinese costume, looking as decorative as ever, and this business side of her that she was showing me didn't seem to me to detract in the least from her charm.

After a pause she said, "And they need not wait, your friends. They can have the things at once if they want to. They can come any day if they telephone to me first so that I may be there to receive them. My husband", she proceeded and her voice grew tender and more confidential than ever, "*he* will not make money. He is not made that way. He may make a name, but money. . . ." She stopped short and then resumed in a low, emphatic tone, "That is for *me* to make." And after another pause

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she said with a smile that I wish I could put into words, "I want our home to be happy and comfortable, and if I have children I shall want them to be well educated; and that is not done without money. *I* shall earn it, and my husband will be free to find out things and become famous."

Wife, mother, sister and fellow human being all spoke in her tone. I thought to myself, "You are a very happy woman, and long may you remain so! But what—oh, what—would the two Eastern ladies who visited our house when I was a child have thought of *this*?" Would they have approved of the ambitions of this girl whom I had just been listening to? I began involuntarily to compare her with the two Indian women, of a generation immediately preceding hers, whom I have spoken of earlier—Shushama Tagore and Sarojini Naidu. In India no less than in China and Japan the yeast that works in women and sets them in a kind of ferment to become a little different from what they have been, had been active for quite a long time. It had been at work all over the East and indeed one might say all over the world. I suppose it was poor Mary Wollstonecraft (whom Horace Walpole called "a hyena in petticoats") who set the ball a-rolling almost a century and a half ago with her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, a book that after all only asked that women should be granted a little more education as something they were entitled to. The mention of that book makes me think of a piece of greenery that I have in my room—I am told it is called "huckleberry foliage". I have had it for some months now and all the time it has been growing and throwing out new shoots, becoming more and more like a Japanese picture every day. It came to me originally with

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some roses and I placed it and them in water which I always kept fresh; and when the roses had fallen and were thrown away I let the huckleberry foliage stay. Somehow I thought that it looked intelligent, and evidently it *was* intelligent; it knew what it wanted and it is doing everything it can to get it. Women, I think, were like this piece of greenery. Suddenly, for no very obvious reason, they felt that they wanted to grow, to send out new shoots, to take up more room, in fact to have a more definite place in the world. And no one can deny that they *have* made a fresh place for themselves. They have grown taller in their minds; they have thrown out what were, for women, new ideas. They were not specially encouraged any more than my huckleberry was but you can't stop things from growing when they grow from the inside. And it seems to me that the younger generations of women—those of the time of Shushama Tagore and of Sarojini Naidu and, later on, of the little Chinese girl I have been trying to tell you about—had a good deal in common with my huckleberry; they may not have been very clear about where they were getting to but they were sure they were getting somewhere. They were all of them, except the lady-in-waiting to the Empress of China, making their way *out* of the romantic era in which I myself and my contemporaries grew up and in which all my feminine forbears had both grown up and died. And even of the lady-in-waiting one might say that though she was not herself “romantic”, she was a part of the romantic era just by virtue of being alive in it. In the course of the dinner at which she and I foregathered the talk at the other end of the table from where we sat turned on the subject of dancing and very naturally so, for Argentina, the then famous dancer, was

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one of our guests of honour. In order, I suppose, to illustrate something she had been saying Argentina at one point in the conversation lifted her arm and moved her shoulders in a dancing posture, and the lady-in-waiting, observing the gesture, remarked—was it to herself or was it to the world in general?—“*I can dance too.*” In these four words, with the emphasis put, as it was, on the first and the last of them, lay the germ of “And I have the right to dance”. The lady-in-waiting was like the rest of her sister-women; we all feel that we have a right to grow.

Lucy Shaw—with a
Side Glance at G.B.S.

8. *Lucy Shaw—With a Side Glance
at G.B.S.*

No one, I think, would have been more surprised than Lucy Shaw to see her name at the top of an account of her. What made her charming—and she had that unusual thing, charm, in full measure—was her apparently complete unself-consciousness. She seemed not to think about herself at all. She did indeed *talk* about herself, and wittily too, for she was by nature, or at least by one side of her nature, witty like her brother Bernard whom she always alluded to as “George”. But although she talked of herself, she never *thought* of herself; she would tell you how she anointed her hair all over with vaseline in order to give it the old-golden shade that it had formerly possessed but she was no more thinking about herself when she made such a confidence than a pigeon is thinking about itself when it anoints its feathers with its own saliva and draws them, one by one, through its beak. She was entirely natural, and among the many persons who have walked into my life and out of it again I can’t think of anyone but her, of whom I could say this. She was Irish of course, and this lack of self-consciousness is, I suppose, one of the things that attract us in the Irish; we find something unexpected about it, and we all like surprises. I daresay that when I knew Lucy the world was less self-

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conscious than it is now. Something like half a century has passed since then, and for many and many a year I had never so much as thought of her. And then this afternoon she suddenly came into my mind, uninvited, radiant and smiling as of old. She just came. Possibly she felt like coming back here for a minute, wanted what we may call an introduction, and found me accessible. At any rate there she was, just as I used to see her and listen to her. She was charming.

She was, as you will have guessed by now, the sister of Bernard Shaw whom, as I have said, she always called "George". And I take it the two had a good deal in common. She was very fond of her brother. His name was seldom out of her voice for long and even when she did not say "George" out loud I think he was often in her mind. The very way in which she laughed at him and made fun of him showed that he was deep in her affections; we don't make happy fun of the people we don't like. "George listens to all I say," she would tell us, "and then he takes the good bits and writes them down as his own, and everybody laughs and thinks how clever he is." She was half in fun and half in earnest when she said that in her charming Irish accent, and it sounded nice. She never struck me as in the least conceited, not one scrap, but she knew, she must have known, that she could say bright and sometimes witty things and that almost everybody liked to be with her and listen to her. *That* is not conceit. It is a plain fact and one that we should not, I think, forget when we hear or read of remarks made by "George" himself. Ireland is Ireland and I think it is different from any other country in the world; it is certainly different from England. When I went there for the first time I felt as

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if I had unconsciously walked through the looking-glass; the things I found there were the same that I had known in other countries but nothing looked or sounded quite the same. And I think that when we meet Irish people out of their native country we should try to remember that Ireland is itself and not anywhere else. Scotland has some points of resemblance with it but is nearer to what most of us regard as the normal; it has much the same sort of common sense as the rest of us, whereas Ireland has an uncommon sense of its own, and perhaps that is why we walk through the looking-glass when we go there and everything seems funny.

It must, I am sure, have been a treat to hear Bernard Shaw and his sister talking together, but that was a treat I was never lucky enough to enjoy. I do not doubt that he was both proud of her and fond of her, as she was of him. She was never tired of dilating on his good points, his perfections. "He is so generous," she would tell us, "you don't know how good he was to mother and to our old aunt." Do many—or any—of us think of Bernard Shaw as a "family man"? I doubt it. He has not presented himself, I think, as one in or of that line. But no one could listen to Lucy Shaw and not be convinced of the sound heart that supported the brain of which we have all been made so aware. Yes, Bernard Shaw had a good friend in his sister; no one who knew her could have a bad opinion of him.

Lucy Shaw's work in life was to be a singer in light opera. I do not know if I have suggested that her appearance was attractive. It was; I think it was exactly what the person who creates the leading lady of light opera would have wished it to be, and that is saying a great deal. But the thing that took her audience, public or

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private, by storm was not her appearance so much as her voice. She had not a *great* voice in any sense of the word; it had no great compass and though it had been well trained—I do not know where—it had not been elaborately disciplined. She produced it without any apparent effort; I suppose she must have had from the first what is called a “natural production”. She didn’t have to think about her singing, and with the natural ear for music that was evidently hers she had no difficulty with accompaniments. She just sat down at the piano and began to play the introduction to what she was about to present to us and then, looking as natural as the thrush upon his branch when he is giving us his best, she sang. Her voice was a mezzo-soprano with a limited range but there was no “veil” over any note within that range and her movement from one note to another was as smooth as the rising of the sun. I have heard many singers in my time but I have never heard one who had the same absolute naturalness and sweetness of tone. The old lady who was at the head of the house in which Lucy and I used to meet had a special fondness for a setting of Christina Rossetti’s poem “When I am dead, my dearest”, and to that song we listened again and again. I think that in writing it Christina Rossetti achieved something that is rare to find in poetry; it *seems* to have been written with the same complete unself-consciousness with which Lucy Shaw used to sing it to us at the Steinway Grand in that old drawing-room so long ago. There is nothing sentimental about it. It is really a letter of directions—something that the writer wished, both from heart and head, to be carried into effect after her death. Christina Rossetti, with her genius for putting herself into verse, gave us the poem and Lucy Shaw was

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able to put into her rendering of it her own genius for life. For that really was, above all else, the gift that had been bestowed upon this sister of Bernard Shaw by her fairy godmother—a genius for life. She had not her brother's enormous talent; she could never have done what he has done but she was able to *be* more integrally, it seems to me, than he is ever likely to have been. Possibly the genius of man tends in the one direction, that of doing, and the genius of woman in the other, that of being. Lucy Shaw just *was*, and that, I imagine, is why she lives in my memory with such vividness. Everything about her—what she did, how she looked and talked and joked and suffered—was tinted with the intensity of life that she carried within her, an intensity so great that we too lived while we were in her company. And perhaps the oddest thing about the whole business was that she herself was completely unconscious both of what she was and of what she did to all the rest of us.

It seems a pity that such women as this should nearly always make a mess of life but apparently it is so appointed. Lucy Shaw might have made a happy and successful marriage with the son of the old lady who loved her so much and asked her so often to sing Christina Rossetti's lines. This son was handsome, of a suitable age, of a charming temperament, well-off in the things of this world, and extremely attractive to women. Many were they who set their caps at him. *He* wanted Lucy, but, for one of those odd reasons that Nature creates and that we don't understand but have to accept, she didn't want him. It was just like Heine's poem about the tangle of human affections that can't be disentangled and arranged in what would seem to be their proper order. It is, as Heine says, an old story and one that is likely to

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repeat itself, generation after generation, to the end. *He* married, much later on, a well-doing, practical woman whom I think he liked but did not love. And *she*—the one who sang Christina Rossetti's little poem—married a member of the caste in which she sang the leading lady's part. I never saw him but I fancy he must have had some sort of fascination. The two met at the theatre, felt, I suppose, an attraction for one another and married without giving much thought to the matter. At any rate they did not remain united for long, and after a while she divorced him and resumed her maiden name. I remember being told that Bernard Shaw had not gone to the wedding and that this had made a crack in his sister's heart. I daresay he saw that the marriage wasn't likely to prove a happy one.

I suppose that when those people with "charm" pass away it is impossible to bring any whiff of their charm back to this earth. And I suppose, or rather let me say I believe, that such calamities as that which I have indicated, are necessary links in the chain of lives that we all wind for ourselves while we are "here". When we see the whole chain displayed before us we shall understand the why and wherefore of the different links and shall look upon the long line of them with complete acceptance. But in the meantime, while we are actually creating the necessary part which is to make one portion of the whole, how difficult it is to accept the tragedy!

Three Meetings with
Mr. Mackenzie King

9. *Three Meetings with Mr. Mackenzie King*

I

On three occasions I had the honour—and it was as much a pleasure as an honour—of being brought into personal contact with Mr. Mackenzie King. And as any flashlight, however feeble, thrown on to a remarkable personality may be of some value to someone at some time, I wish to record what happened at each meeting exactly as it seemed to me to happen. On each occasion the personality in question presented itself to me from a new angle, and if I had had the opportunity of observing it fifty times more, it would doubtless have shown me fifty other angles. Mr. Mackenzie King had, I should guess, a very complex character, simple though it might seem to any casual looker-on. Here are my own particular little items about him. I take them off the pegs one by one.

My first encounter with Mr. Mackenzie King must have taken place more than a score of years ago. I was spending a week-end in Ottawa at Government House and on the very day of my arrival, a Saturday, I was introduced to Mr. King, who had come to talk business with the then Governor-General, Lord Byng. He had smiled at me pleasantly but there had been no time

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for any inter-change of words, for he and the Governor-General had immediately withdrawn, presumably to discuss the matter they had to deal with.

Mr. King, however, had evidently found time to give me a lodgement in his capacious mind, for next day, as I emerged from my room, he stopped as he passed and greeted me by name, and we began to descend the stairs together. He was in morning dress and had, I suppose, been talking business again with Lord Byng.

This was the first time in my life that I had found myself a companion to the office of Prime Minister (for that was how the situation struck me) and I could think of nothing to say. Nothing of mine seemed suitable to be said out loud. I was extremely conscious that, for the moment in hand, I was no good. And as my companion said nothing either, we went down the stairs in absolute silence and when we were on the ground floor entered a long narrow hall-way or corridor which divided us from the drawing-room. Here too we both continued silent until we had got to about the middle of the "lane", when Mr. King stopped short for a moment and said with emphasis (but I did not feel that he was talking to me), "When I am at home on Sundays I like a little bit of supper. But I *don't* like a heavy meal on a Sunday night." We resumed our walk.

I don't know whom he was speaking to. As I have said, I didn't feel that it was to me, and yet if I had not been there, he wouldn't, I imagine, have said what he did—not out loud. Being at a loss for anything suitable to say in response I still kept silent, and when we reached the drawing-room door he opened it and we went in. This was my first meeting with a "Prime Minister", and it certainly doesn't seem to have amounted to much.

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And yet, in some mysterious way that I can't explain, after this confession of Mr. King's, if one may call it so, I felt that somehow I had become intimate with him, that we were "friends". Perhaps it was because I too don't like a heavy meal on a Sunday evening. Perhaps I had a notion that he wouldn't have made his remark if he hadn't felt at home with me; he wouldn't have made it, for instance, to Lady Byng. He talked, I remember, at dinner; he did his duty like a man. But his voice at the dinner-table didn't carry with it any suggestion of that thing which lies at the bottom of a well—as it had done in the corridor. Now he was the man of the world.

2

I had never expected to meet Mr. King again, and when, some two or three years later, another opportunity of doing so did present itself, I was in two minds about taking advantage of it. It came one morning in the form of a telegram from friends of mine in Ottawa, who asked me to come on the following night and dine with them. Mr. Mackenzie King was to be one of their guests. I was very busy at the time and decided that I must decline this invitation. Indeed I was on the way to the Post Office to send a telegram to that effect when I fell in with a friend to whom I spoke of my decision and who remarked upon it, "You may never have another chance of meeting a Prime Minister. You had better go." When one bit of us wants to do a thing we are as a rule easily persuaded to do it and a bit of me did want to see Mr. King again. So my telegram was one of acceptance instead of refusal and the evening of the next day found me in Ottawa.

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The dinner was an eminently enjoyable one. It was excellent in itself—there was little you could have told our host either about cooking or wine—it was quietly and capably served and the atmosphere that pervaded it was both festive and cosy, a rare combination, I think, at any time. On this occasion it was mainly due, I would say, to the genial mood of the chief guest, Mr. Mackenzie King, who had a remarkable gift of drawing people together. How he did it I don't know, but I fancy that his power of divesting himself of all that pertained to the politician and public man and retaining nothing but a sort of *bonhomie* and simple good humour was at the root of it. We have all of us met people who have "said" to us, in the language without words, "I am as good as you—and better!" We don't so often come across the other kind who say, in the same language, "*You* are as good as I—and better! Let us be friends, for the moment at least!" This wish seemed to emanate from the P.M. (as they all apparently called him in Ottawa) and to envelop each one of us. Can you wonder that our dinner was a success?

Our little party numbered only six persons, our host and hostess, Mr. King and myself and a couple, husband and wife, quite evidently friends to whom the Prime Minister was greatly attached. Indeed I have an idea that it was owing to their presence that the evening went off so happily. You know the feeling of being a member of a little group where each link fits exactly into its neighbour link, so that you are no longer your isolated self but part of a whole. That was the feeling I had on this occasion. I am somewhat ashamed to say, however, that I cannot recall any particular subject that we talked about nor even any notable observation made by any-

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one. We certainly talked but, so far as I remember, no pearls of wisdom or diamonds of epigram dropped from any of our lips.

Yet our little party did not break up without its moment of amusement. We women had gone upstairs, ostensibly in order to help the one of us who had to go out into the white Canadian night into her "things" but actually in order to inspect some very lovely embroidered underwear that our hostess had brought back with her from her oriental travels. We were engrossed in our inspection when the voice of Mr. King, crying "*Are you coming?*" fell upon our ears and the moment after, he himself appeared at the door. It was evident that he was still in his merry mood and was not in the least annoyed at our tardiness or anxious for us to *hurry*. Indeed when he saw that our hostess had just lifted a dressing-gown out of the drawer, he went up to her, took it from her with a smile, shook it out of its folds and then, slipping his arms through the kimono armholes and drawing the amplitude of the garment round his sizable waist with the sash, he surveyed us, the smile—and it really was a smile—still on his face. And we laughed.

It is impossible to say how funny he looked, the dressing-gown was so entirely feminine and he so utterly masculine. We laughed and laughed and he, spurred on by our ready participation in his doings, staged a little playlet—the impersonation of a lady arranging herself for going out, making herself up before the mirror and twisting from side to side so as to catch a glimpse all round the globe, as one might say. I don't suppose the performance lasted more than half a minute, but just as Mr. King's brief sentence, years before, had left upon

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me the impression of a conversation, so this little scrap of acting made me feel as if I had been present at a play. Mr. King had the faculty of *presentation* in a greater degree than anyone who has come my way; he put a thing before you so definitely that you felt you had it for your own. An invaluable talent for a Prime Minister to possess.

3

For some years, five or six perhaps, after this little dinner encounter with Mr. King I did not even catch a glimpse of him. Then I met him again on board a steamer by which I was returning to Canada from a trip in Europe. In the intervening period I had once got a letter from him: it had been handed to me just as I was stepping into my train for Montreal after a day in Ottawa, and it expressed the writer's pleasure in what I had done and his regret at not having been able to see me while I was so near him. Not many things, I fancy, give us in a small way a greater *satisfaction* than being remembered by someone more importantly placed in the world than ourselves, and I do not think that snobbery necessarily enters into that feeling; what gratifies us is rather the reassurance in ourselves which such a friendly reminder may bring with it. I can recall with what a warm sense of gratitude I stepped into my train after reading Mr. King's note. I am sure this capacity of his to remember must have stood him in as good stead as anything else in his career.

The steamer I have spoken of had docked at Quebec for some hours, to let off passengers and put out freight, and I was in my deck-chair, reading a book, when I was accosted by someone who pronounced my name. I

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looked up, and there was Mr. King, smiling and sociable. "May I sit down?" he said. I detached one of my two rugs so that he could wrap himself round in the chair at my side. It was not cold but it was chilly, a lovely late-autumn evening. The time of day must have been about five-thirty or six o'clock and the ship was making its usual noisy announcement that it was about to leave; shouts and creakings and the clank of chains and all the rest of it told us that we were starting on the final stage of our voyage.

"I often take this way of getting back to Montreal," my companion said, "I love the river trip."

It isn't really what we say that counts, it is the way we say it. If I were to write a volume I could not reproduce the accent of home-loving gratitude with which Mr. King uttered these words. I do not doubt that in certain ways he was a citizen of the world, but down in the place where it really matters, that spot for which we have no authentic name, he was Canadian and nothing else.

We must have talked for a good hour on that golden autumn afternoon and I am sure the subjects we discussed were many and various though I have quite forgotten now what most of them were. They started with some of my summer experiences in Poland and Austria, about which Mr. King put a number of questions to me. These questions made me realize what different things we humans notice when we travel abroad. If our roles had been reversed and it had been his part to tell me of what he had seen in Warsaw and Vienna, would he have been able to answer my questions? No better, I daresay, than I could answer his. I may say, however, that all my inadequacies in supplying the information desired were

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taken by him in the pleasantest spirit. If "bland" were a more attractive word I would apply it to Mr. King; I have met few people who accepted things just in the way he did. Such acceptance was an achievement in itself.

Near the end of our conversation (and I cannot recollect what we had been talking about at the moment) he suddenly put his hand into an inner breast-pocket of his coat and drew out an old-fashioned daguerrotype case, opened it and handed it to me. The elderly lady portrayed on one side of the case attracted me and as I looked at her I instinctively said, "Oh, what a kind face!" He looked pleased and responded, "That was my mother." I examined the portrait more closely and thought to myself, "There aren't any like that nowadays!" She wore a mid-Victorian gown, ankle-long in the skirt, very full and concealing; its material, I would guess, was of black silk, so "good" that it would stand of itself. The little bodice, high-collared and long-sleeved, was buttoned down the tightly fitting front. The things that she wore were not unlike what we are wearing to-day but somehow the whole effect made by them was different; it suggested, if this is intelligible, a greater permanence. Her gown looked as if it were meant to last; it would still be "good", in its fashion, and wearable long after the day on which she had sat for her photograph, whereas in the case of our modern garments a "come to-day and go to-morrow" policy is the rule. And something very similar might be said of the face that I was scrutinizing; it bore the marks of an intelligence which the habit, probably a life-long habit, of considering things had impressed upon it. This old lady had been no fly-away girl. Her course, both as girl

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and woman, had been guided by sound common sense, and the outcome, or at least one of the outcomes, of such a course was manifested in the living human creature who sat beside me, smiling so pleasantly and evidently waiting for me to speak. All I said, as I handed the case back to him was, "You were fortunate, weren't you?" And as he replaced the case in his breast-pocket he said, "I carry it always with me." And I felt that with these two remarks a long and confidential conversation had taken place between us.

This was my last meeting with Mr. Mackenzie King.

Brave Spirits

